YOU NO LONGER COUNT

RENÉ BOYLESVE

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Mary B. Bowers

August 1918

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(TU N'ES PLUS RIEN!)

BY

RENÉ BOYLESVE

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH

BY

LOUISE SEYMOUR HOUGHTON

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I

FROM the swoon into which the sudden, agonizing shock had thrown her, her soul escaped, shook itself free, as the mind shakes off a nightmare. There is first a sensation of relief from discomfort, then a cheering sense of safety, and one slips contentedly into a half-slumber. Then it all begins again, for one no longer believes that it answers to any reality.

Was she still asleep? Was it memory, was it imagination that unrolled before her vision pictures of the past which yet her musings had never till then evoked, and which suddenly presented themselves with annoying vividness? There were whisperings, murmuring voices in the next room. She was aware of them, yet to the unwonted sounds she paid no attention; the gentle, persistent pressure of an invisible hand turned back her thoughts to days gone by.

A hushed step upon the carpet, a finger questioning her pulse, no more disturbed her

than the familiar cry of the huckster in the street. She did not wonder: "What, am I ill? Are they anxious about me? Why am I in bed, in broad daylight, I so young, so unused to illness of any kind?" She was recalling a certain time, days that seemed far remote, a period of her life that seemed to have been acted before her eyes, like a play in the theatre.

A summer month of one of the previous years. She saw again the last days in her suburban home, just outside of Paris, the sloping garden and the vista through the leafage over far-distant hills, splendid and ethereal. Every one was getting ready for the summer holiday; some of the men were going to the training-camps. What a world of talk! What discussions with friends who had been invited to the country for an afternoon of farewells! They were a world by themselves—young, alert, fond of pleasure, and of all things beautiful and adventurous, care-free, and charming. The oldest of the men was M. de la Villaumer, whose hair was beginning to turn gray, but who enjoyed

himself only among kindly faces. Several were artists—musicians or painters. They loved the beautiful things of life and that life of the intellect which easily adapts itself to the beautiful. Love was king in their circle, a love rather kindly than passionate, whose ravages they had learned how to conceal. Yet many admirable couples were found among them. Odette Jacquelin and her husband were always cited as the most enamoured pair of the group. After them came Clotilde and George Avvogade, who cooed like turtle-doves, but were lovers only "for a curtain-raiser," it used to be said. Rose Misson, whom they called "good Rose," Simone de Prans, Germaine Le Gault, were all women who adored their husbands and asked for no other happiness, having no idea of anything else than happiness.

Why, they used to ask, was Jean Jacquelin an officer of reserves? What was the sense of that biennial war-game for a chap who had nothing military in him, whether by tradition, education, or belief? The old father had made a point of it, because he held to the

ineradicable prejudices of his time. As for Jean himself, he made light of it; he was a young fellow well on the way to make a fortune and give Odette all the luxuries that in their circle were considered not superfluities, but things indispensable. It never occurred to him that any other purpose could seriously occupy a man's mind. Without entering into the thousand and one interests of certain of his more cultivated friends who were given to reasoning and theorizing, he simply found that the uniform of a sublieutenant was becoming, and that, when he was obliged to wear it, it was simply an opportunity to make himself fit; physical fatigue was nothing to him; he might be inclined to think the Grand Manœuvres a superannuated exercise; he might even smile at them and amuse himself by enumerating the blunders of such and such a commander; but something always kept him from ever making light of the thing itself. For that matter, being a reserve officer was perhaps one of the many whims of society, but it was what is called decent; in certain circles it was done.

So he let them talk and harangue, opposing no arguments but continuing to be a reserve officer, carrying through his period of instruction when he was called.

This time the young wife had gone with him as far as Tours, to be with him a few hours longer and after that to receive his letters more promptly. How long the time had seemed, all alone in the Hôtel de l'Univers! And yet she had a pretty room! She had amused herself with piquing public curiosity on the Rue Nationale, with her little walking-suit of the latest cut, and her simple canoe hat—quite the "Parisienne on a holiday"—and the elegance of her manners, at once independent and circumspect, as were all her ways. It was generally agreed that she was pretty. Who was not asking questions about her in the hotel, at the restaurant? It had amused her to see a family of tourists inventing pretexts for changing places at their small table, this one in order to face her, that one in order that the grown-up son might not face her. And how they had stared at her!

Telegrams had come from the sublieutenant. "Be at Pont-de-Piles to-morrow, darling," or "Ligueil, such a day for lunch," or "Loches, Hôtel de France, after breaking up." And she had sometimes waited a long while in wayside inns or beside dusty highways.

Conversations at table began to come back to her. Every one had been talking of the manœuvres, discussing the names of generals, the communes that were being occupied. The presence of the President of the Republic was an event in the countryside. There had been old men who would consent to speak of nothing nearer than 1870; others, of fewer years, would recall the magnificent condition of the reconstituted army at the time of Gambetta's death, or at the period of the Schnaebele affair, when the country was so near to seeing it in action. A politician of the neighborhood—not more stupid, after all, than most of his contemporaries—rubicund, his eyes bloodshot at the end of dinner, had fallen foul of all these memories, regrets, would-be warlike emotions, and turned

them upside down like eggs in a frying-pan. According to him, war was the scourge of bygone ages. France, the nation of progress, still consented to carry on a semblance of it, by way of facilitating necessary transitions, but it was a mere play of protocols, a final concession to the past. War was destructive; modern society was interested wholly in production; to believe in war was to turn back the clock of history. For that matter, every well-informed person was aware that scientific means of destruction had become such that a fratricidal conflict had been rendered impossible, im–pos–si–ble! One must be an idiot not to perceive that everything would be reduced to fragments in the twinkling of an eye. The manœuvres! ah, you made him laugh with your manœuvres! The manœuvres were no more like war than a toy pistol was like a German mortar. War, should it ever break out, would not last the time it would take to concentrate your army corps; the first of two adversaries who should be half a day ahead would bring the other to cry mercy.

"Well, say," some one had interrupted, "it wouldn't be a bad plan, then, to do one's best to get that half-day's advance?"

"Useless! Count your population, consider your aspirations. Think of the finances. Finances! There is not a country of great armaments that could maintain war for six weeks, nor one that could even endure three years' preparation for war. . . . Ask the great banks, which have the world in leading-strings, emperors and kings as well as peoples; don't deceive yourselves; war is impossible, im–pos–si–ble! We are witnessing, with your manœuvres, the final deeds of a prehistoric age. . . . Turn your eyes to the future, gentlemen, and all this bedizened and vociferous gang will seem to you like children's toys!"

"But Germany—the militant party—the Pangermanists?"

"Germany is a pacific nation, industrial and commercial, which uses its cannon as an advertising dodge. What we lack—don't you know?—is precisely business sense. And Germany has business sense. The military

party? A drop of water in a lake. The Pangermanists? Advertising men in the pay of the national industry. In the first place, the Emperor, as every one says who has seen him near at hand, is a secret friend of France . . . and I will add, the most republican of us all. Socialism, that's his enemy! . . . The army that we need is not a rabble of soldiers, but a group of men bent upon keeping the peace. Humanity is on the march—it can never be repeated too often—toward a future of liberty, equality, fraternity. Ah, you must reckon with economic rivalry; that is the law of life."

"Precisely so."

Memory, quickened no doubt by her feverish condition, brought back to the young wife with extraordinary precision, even to the least of them, these utterances overheard at her solitary little table. True, she had amused herself with repeating them to the sublieutenant, her husband—she even recalled the moment—he was splashing in his bath, soaping himself, on his return from the manœuvres. He had laughed with

all his heart, for when Jean had come back from the manœuvres he was another man from what he had been when going to them. Only a few days of presence with the corps, among his military comrades, had transformed him or, more correctly, had restored him to his normal disposition; or, in any case, had made him victor over the indolence with which he usually replied to the fine talkers of Paris.

As for Odette, she had attached not the slightest importance to any of these ideas, by whomever enunciated. Brought up in the one religion of happiness, she held that happiness through love was the sole boon to be asked of fate. What was the use of arguing? Why think about calamity? Did not certain of her friends, those most reputed for intelligence, insist that it was the honor of civilized man not even to think of acts of barbarism, that man raised himself in dignity as he neglected to prepare himself to make use of arms? Among many other sayings the oft-repeated, if somewhat cynical, pronouncement of M. de la Villaumer came

back to her: "We are not in a condition to make war. We are unaware how far we are not in a condition to make war, because we do not in the least know what war is. If war is made upon us, as there is reason to fear—as well the deluge."

And yet, that day, on coming out of his bath, Jean had become so wrought up in talking of the army that he had almost made his wife afraid! She had thrown her arms around him as he wrapped himself in his bathrobe, saying:

"Don't talk so, Jean! Oh, imagine, if even you were to be so much as disfigured by an ugly wound! Your lovely eyes, my darling! Your beautiful teeth!—No, that would drive me wild!"

And because he had laughed, laughed heartily, so as completely to close his lovely eyes, she had at once thought of something else.

Without ever thinking of going even slightly into subjects of this sort, she had been buoyed up by a great credulity, born of optimism; not, indeed, as to war, which in-

terested her not the least, but as to Jean, who alone was of consequence, and who, as a "reserve officer," she was sure could not be called to take part in a campaign. It was an artless idea, rooted in her mind by the pressure of her exuberant happiness. For nothing in the world would she have tried to get at the root of it, lest the result should prove uncomfortable. It was the same self-indulgent, mental indolence which, for example, had withheld her from asking herself the meaning of words that dropped from her husband's lips:

"Well, here I am, attached to the covering troops. You and I will not be able to go into Touraine." Well, they would not be able to go into Touraine; they would go somewhere else.

Then memory carried her on to the beginning of last season, at the seashore. The weather had been so fine! Jean had been so lucky as to get his vacation from his commercial house by the 15th of July; they had gone to Surville. The Hotel de Normandie was already well filled, the Casino was

crowded, sports were humming, the Little Theatre was exhibiting Parisian vedettes, a row of autos was sending vile smells up to the terrace where every one sat of afternoons imbibing soft drinks and roasting in the sun to the music of the gypsy orchestra; elegant young men were displaying khaki costumes, martingales, and broad-brimmed hats. In the evening every one had danced the tango in the hall. The great stir of the watering-place had begun—futile doings without number, comings and goings, from bar to bar, from casino to casino, from luncheon to luncheon.

"Oh, say, are you coming? Look here, Jean! Aren't you tiresome, always reading despatches! One would say that you were expecting something to happen. What concern is it of yours?"

Every evening, on their way to the great hall of the Casino through the gallery that looked out upon the sea, whether going to the theatre or the music-hall, or simply intending to sit down and drink their coffee or their camomile, they had found a crowd of

men in tuxedos standing before the frame that hung on the right of the door, on which despatches from Paris and quotations of the Bourse were posted. Odette could still hear the reproaches she had addressed to her husband as he returned with unwonted seriousness from reading them.

"Well, what about it all?" she had asked. Jean had kept back some of the more sensational news, but one evening he had added:

"There is an ultimatum to Serbia."

"What of that?"

Nothing more had been said. But Jean had risen twice from his chair to speak to men whom he knew, conferring with them in the lobby, then returning to his wife.

"Oh, nothing will happen yet," he had said.

This had gone on for several evenings. It had become necessary to explain some things. Then Odette herself had become anxious; she would go with her husband to read the despatches; she would go to them by herself in the daytime. But the number

of readers was increasing, and the silence, or the few words that would escape from the group, troubled her; she would go down to the beach to read the despatches at the *Figaro* kiosk. Threats of war? . . . European war? . . . War? . . . No, surely that was not likely. The idea was finding extreme difficulty in penetrating people's skulls. Despatch was succeeding despatch, twice a day, now reassuring, now disturbing; but whenever one contained matter for alarm, it was always better founded than that of the previous day.

Odette had at last asked her husband:

"Well, if by any chance there should be war, would that affect you—yourself?"

"Don't be in a hurry, my darling; war has not yet been declared."

"But—but—if it should be?"

"Well, if it should be, I am a reserve officer."

"What is the reserve? Is it when there are no more active soldiers?"

He had kissed her, laughing. Not long before a relative of one of the most influen-

tial bankers in Paris had declared, at a neighboring table, that "All was arranged!"

But the next morning a rumor had been spread at the Casino that the news was so discouraging it had not been posted. Jean had gone to ascertain. The rumor had been confirmed. Then he had said to his wife:

"It is time to take precautions. Listen, my darling, I shall go to Paris this evening. I will set my business in order, I will see La Villaumer, who knows everything, and Avvogade, who lunches with the President of the Council. I shall learn what can be learned, and I shall try to return by night."

Once again she could hear all these words, could see again his slightest actions, could imagine La Villaumer, so far-seeing, and Clotilde Avvogade, surrounded by her flowers in her almost too delicious apartment, making a face when she heard her husband talking of disagreeable things. She lived over again the sad night that she had passed alone, sleepless, and the bat that had flown into her room like a little devil, and the faces next morning at the Casino, on the beach,

everywhere! And the departures, the almost empty hotel, ever since that evening when she had been expecting her husband—the evening when he did not come!

He did not come because he had found in Paris an order to "join immediately for a period of instruction." He had telegraphed to her: "Don't leave; all will be well; will write."

A period of instruction! So suddenly decided upon! What did that mean? Was it war? She had asked the people around her. Some had seemed stunned by her question; others had said: "A period of instruction? Nothing is more usual."

"As a matter of fact, they are mobilizing," some one had remarked. A gentleman had said: "No, madame, mobilization cannot be other than general. It may be that certain officers have been summoned individually, but that is merely a measure of precaution; the situation is evidently strained."

"But why should he be called and not others? He is only an officer of reserves."

"That depends upon the locality of his

depot, no doubt. Do you know where it is?"

"I know that he formerly belonged to the Eleventh Corps, but I think he has been passed over to Nancy."

"Covering troops. Ah—ah!"

"That is it precisely, sir; he is attached to the covering troops."

"Oh, very well! Oh, very well!"

She had found another woman in the same case as herself, or nearly so. But the husband of this one, who also had been individually called, was a captain in active service, and in garrison at Pont-à-Mousson.

"That one," Odette had said to herself; "it is all over with him."

The difference had seemed to be to her own advantage, and her courage had risen correspondingly. Jean was only a sublieutenant; he belonged only to the reserves. She was absorbed in compassion for the other woman, so different in character from herself, bravely prepared for the war and ready to sacrifice everything; who had said:

"I regret that my boys are not grown; they would be so many more defenders of the country."

Odette had been as ill prepared as possible for such an utterance. Everything about it surprised her; she could not understand it in the least.

A lady had arrived from Paris, the wife of a deputy. She had said to any who would listen:

"I may as well tell you; mobilization will be ordered to-morrow."

The weather had been ideally fine, though there had been a suggestion of thunder-storms in the west. Children were playing on the beach; the sea, under a cloudless sky, was calm even to torpor. One could see Havre stretched along in the sunlight, like a greyhound panting with heat; in the distance were noble passenger-ships, and tiny sails apparently motionless. Never had the sky, the sea, the land, appeared so much to long for peace; never, perhaps, had the joy of existence been more imperious. Whatever might be the subjects of alarm, everything

cried aloud that to believe in coming misfortune was impossible.

The next day, Saturday, August 1, Odette, distressed by vague talk that gave no definite information, had gone to the post with a letter to her dear Jean. She had addressed it to Paris, since she had no knowledge where to reach him. It was about four o'clock. She had seen a group forming before the mayor's office, and the town drummer arriving, with a long retinue of street urchins at his heels. The drummer was a tall youth, lean and wan, grave with a gravity not usual in a town drummer who has to announce that a little, long-haired, bright-gray dog is lost. The crowd had gathered around him with frantic eagerness, while he executed his preliminary performance. Then, drawing a paper from his pocket, he had unfolded it and read at the top of his voice, without the slightest change of countenance:

"General mobilization is declared! The first day of mobilization is Sunday, August 2. No man may set out without first con-

sulting the bill which will be immediately posted." And the drummer had beaten the ban.

With a single impulse, as if under orders, the crowd, mainly composed of young men, had raised their hats, crying: "*Vive la France!*" One lad had said: "*Vive la guerre!*" And the drummer had departed to repeat his message at another crossroads.

It had seemed a perfectly simple event, something almost usual, at the junction of these four streets of the little town. A deed done; the pattering of dispersing feet; silence! And this simple act, repeated hundreds of thousands of times at this same hour, was the most tragic alarm-cry in the history of man, reverberating at the same moment of time over all the terrestrial globe. Little noise, almost no words, and all these men, raising their hats to pronounce a word suddenly become sacred, had made the sacrifice of their lives. Imagination loses itself in picturing the multitude of points upon this earth on which a like gift of self had just been made. For if the man who goes hopes to

be spared, he who learns that he is called to go, for the moment gives himself, body and soul.

Almost instantaneously the church-bells had broken out with the tocsin, as if the town had been on fire. Every church; then, on the hills, throughout the countryside, the same signal of distress spread like an epidemic. It had been too recent to be utterly terrifying; many heard it and did not think. No one realized the tragedy to which these humble little bells were sorrowfully calling the world. It is the salvation of men that they always limit their thoughts to the most immediate duty. The thought of a pair of shoes, of the place where one's *livret* is hidden, of saying good-by to this one or that one, checks the vertigo which the enormity of the event might well produce.

At first Odette had felt oppressed and wept like a nervous child who hears a sudden alarm. She had been unable, for her tears, to see the letter-box into which she dropped that letter to Jean which no longer signified anything and would doubtless

never reach him to whom it was addressed. And all around her, at the doors, in the streets, on the beach, at the hotel, women had been weeping.

Odette had gone up to her room. She had said to her maid:

"What about you, Amelia?"

"Me? Mine must join on the second day. I thought of asking Madame if I might take this evening's train; to-morrow there will be no room for civilians. That way I might kiss him good-by——"

"Go, Amelia."

She had seated herself at the window that looked out upon the flower-garden, the deserted tennis-courts, the sea. She was alone. There was nothing for her to do but think and wait.

Everything around her had seemed stunned, congealed. It was as if there was no longer any one anywhere. The smoke of three great transatlantics in the Havre roadstead—sole perceptible movement—was rising straight up in the motionless air. A few fair-weather clouds on the horizon

were turning a fleecy rose color. One or two fishing-smacks, all sails spread, were idling as on a lake. In ordinary times one would have said: "What a glorious sunset we shall have!" And Odette thought: "The men in those boats, at this moment, *do not know!*"

An involuntary change had instantaneously taken place in her mind. She had transported herself to a time like that which still reigned in the boats, a time when "*They did not know!*" A time when there was nothing unusual in the world, when life, smiling, had sung to her, when the hope of a yet lovelier life had lulled thought to sleep. That time—already so far distant—was only an hour ago. And everything had been changed—changed as nothing had ever been changed before. Were they living on the same planet as in that former time? Who could have dreamed, at that time, of what was taking place now? She tried to foresee the morrow, but she could imagine nothing—nothing. Only La Villaumer's saying came back to her: "We are not in condition. . . . As well the deluge!"

And for all that, deep down, very deep within herself, she had not at all believed in the horror that had come.

She had remained sitting there, at her window, until the hour for dinner, living over her past life with Jean—thrilling with his first caresses. She had never loved any one but Jean before her marriage; since her marriage, only him. It was no longer the war which seemed to her unimaginable, but the power of her love for Jean. And instead of imagining chaos, her natural inclination had impelled her to summon up the loveliest pictures of the past. She had smiled, her body had relaxed, her fingers had quivered as if in anticipation of a caress, and in the empty air her lips had made the motion of a kiss.

A man's voice on the balcony next her own had said:

"It is absurd to think of nature as taking note of our affairs; but just for curiosity look at that sky: I have never seen anything like it."

The words had been spoken to some one in the next room, who drew near to the win-

dow, and she had heard a woman's voice exclaiming, with a moan or in desperate appeal, such as one seldom hears.

Odette had risen, and she too had looked out. She had never been superstitious, and was especially not inclined to doleful prognostications. She had always been happy; her life had flowed along, so to speak, like one continued festival. Being alone in her room, she did not speak; but all her flesh quivered.

It may well be that similar phenomena occur sometimes without attracting our attention; yet, on that day, to three persons occupying neighboring rooms in a hotel, to others also, who had spoken of it at dinner or in the evening, that sunset appeared utterly unusual, and such as might justify all gossiping conjectures as to the relations of the earth with the marvellous changes, stupendous in their nature, which take place in the vault of heaven. Above the quiet sea the whole horizon was a fiery furnace, blazing with intense fervency, across which were spread, like fragments of slashed flesh,

long clouds of a livid bluish red. Before long the intense fire died down, as if all the combustible matter had been devoured by the fury of the flames. Then the disk of the sun appeared in outline, like a gigantic blood-blister, like a crystal bowl so overful that the viscous liquid was escaping by some fissure and spreading to right and left into a marsh, a lake, an ocean of human serum, flowing in every direction toward rivers with contracted banks, which upheaved against it a formidable tide. Suddenly the sinister blister burst of itself and was absorbed in the mass of burning matter, or of thick waters, heavy and foul, and became thin streams like those that trickle from a slaughter-house.

No, truly, it was no vertigo of the imagination, no hallucination of the vision, no compliant romance; it was a real picture, symbolic of aspect, preceding, like an inadequate vignette, the flaming pages of the great book of history that had just been opened.

In Odette's soul it had been like a curtain

that falls before a new act; once the curtain is raised, one's expectation is fixed; no more light comedy, no more pleasant extravaganzas, no more ballet! The tragedy is about to begin.

With a bound her fevered memory overleaped several months of war. They had entered an atmosphere of fire; it was hard, but they endured it. Alsace: a breath of wild hope, penultimate moment of Old France; Belgium: enthusiasm first, horror afterward; alliances: prognostications, so-called assured, as to the "final result"; invasion: a march to the scaffold in which the condemned cling to a hope of the improbable; the Marne: the improbable realized, for which no one had dared to hope; the enemy grappled with and hurled back; the fall of Antwerp, of which so many folk, who will appear again in the end, insist that "it has not the least importance."

Odette had received letters from Jean. How could Jean be in such a fiery furnace? And how had she been able to endure the thought? But many things once believed im-

possible were beginning to be recognized as possible. Jean was enduring his fatigues, and everything in him was taking on a new character. She had found him not such as he had been on his return from the manœuvres, but a man exalted above himself, who seemed to have transcended his own height, however he might try to appear simply his usual charming self. She could divine his sufferings, and yet she felt him to be happy. Odette had even come to think: "How little he needs me!" She had returned to Paris that she might receive his letters more promptly. But he appeared no longer to have any notion of time. That was because he was no longer master of his time. Odette was always writing to him as to an isolated being, who could do with himself as he liked. Without intending it, he would reply to her letters as if he were one who had no individual existence, a man carried away by something greater than himself, something which alone counted. She had not yet been able to understand, and she had gently reproached Jean for neglecting her.

And yet Odette's perpetual anxiety had been gradually growing less; she was already gaining confidence. Jean had passed through so many dangers! She had begun to believe in a possible immunity. How many men had been in the midst of wars through all a long life, and yet had died in bed, surrounded by their families!

Then, suddenly, one fine morning in the second fortnight of September Odette, still in bed, had heard the door-bell at an hour when seldom any one came to the front door. Amelia, her own maid, who had answered the bell, had rushed, breathless, to her mistress:

"Madame! it is Madame de Prans who insists upon seeing Madame!"

From her bed Odette had called out: "Come in, Simone, come right in!"

Simone de Prans had brought tidings of Jean. She had received them from dear Pierrot, her husband, who had been sent to Paris for twenty-four hours on a mission.

Tidings of Jean? But, to begin with, they were satisfactory? How?—satisfactory?

Well, she could say that they were not bad. But "not bad" is not good! No, but one must not exaggerate things. In short, half-admissions, denials, returns upon the question, openings left for hope, equivocal utterances, embarrassments of which Odette soon ceased to be the dupe. And she had had courage to say, suddenly:

"My little Simone, you dare not acknowledge that the greatest of calamities has befallen me."

It was at that moment of half-wakefulness during which all these previous events had passed before her memory, that Odette suddenly came broad awake. She uttered a great cry, and every one in the next room came running.

But now, after all, Odette refused to believe the dreadful fact which she herself had divined! She declared that it could not be, it was "too unjust."

Why should Jean be killed and not another? With fierce anger she revolted against her lot, crying out and struggling in her bed like a mad woman.

"It is not true! it is not true! you all have a grudge against me! you are jealous of me because of Jean! . . . Jean, my Jean, I shall yet embrace you, or there is no God!" —until suddenly, vociferating and shrieking, she again lost consciousness.

II

HER doctor was there, in a major's uniform. They had found him as by a miracle: he happened to be at home, at the telephone, the very moment when Amelia called him. As he could not remain he gave his instructions to Simone de Prans, to Germaine Le Gault, to Rose Misson, the last two, notified by Simone, having dressed in all haste and rushed to her. The door-bell was constantly ringing. The news of Odette's affliction was spreading through Paris. True, the war had already caused many bereavements, but among this intimate group, Lieutenant Jacquelin was the first to fall.

Odette, recovering her senses, found herself in the position of an exceptional

victim among her friends, both women and men.

But the women, while encompassing her with compassion, had in their eyes, their voices, something other than bereavement usually inspires. When they tried to utter consoling words, all, without exception, spoke of "pride," of the "honor" which was reflected upon Odette. Odette accepted the words as a part of the phraseology of condolence; but she considered only one thing—Jean no longer existed. Her Jean, her lover, her happiness, her preoccupation, her days, her nights, her revery of yesterday, her hope for to-morrow; Jean, caresses, kisses, tenderness, sweetness, perfume, foolishness and wisdom, the beloved master and yet the child, to be cradled in her arms; Jean—a thousand times more than her own life—was no longer numbered among men! She could see him again, from head to foot, in the minutest physical details, and in the same moment she was certain that he was no longer anything other than a phantom; that never again her arms of flesh would press to

her his flesh, that her lips would never again kiss his lips. Tears did not come in the torrents that bring solace to the sharpest griefs. The period of yielding to a cruel fate, when one pities oneself, had not come to her. Rebellion still persisted. Odette raged, uttered bitter words. The honeyed soothings of her friends only exasperated her. Other friends were continually coming up to see her. She fell into hysterics. The doctor had gone. The most determined of those present, "good" Rose Misson and Mme. de Blauve, a woman who inspired respect, took upon themselves to turn all the others out of the room and to close the front door against every one.

Rose Misson was a little woman, plump and mild, whose husband, some fifteen years older than herself, and free of all military obligation, had entered the service as chauffeur at the beginning of the war. Misson was somewhat criticised for this step. Therefore Rose, who felt the power of public opinion, was full of admiration of the lot of her friend Odette. Private griefs are nothing in comparison with the special consciousness which

public opinion arouses in us. Notwithstanding her real love for him, at the present moment Rose would have preferred her husband dead rather than ill appreciated. Rose's sentiment with regard to her friend might have been thus expressed:

"Yes, my dear, your grief is immense; your existence as a wife is shattered. But everybody feels that your lot is beautiful. You will grow greater among us all, will eclipse us, each and every one. From this day you have gained universal veneration; your name is pronounced with reverence; you are changed in our eyes; your presence brings even to us a meaning which we never knew before; the memory of your husband, his glorious name, is something august which is penetrating a circle in which such a quality has never been known."

Rose said nothing of all this to her friend, because the language of their circle did not lend itself to such thoughts; perhaps also, even while thinking them, she had no wish to utter them.

For the first time since the outbreak of

war Odette did not ask for the evening paper. To read the news—the *communiqué ?* How indifferent she was to all that! There was nothing more for her to learn. Her husband was dead; for her the war was ended. The war had been him, anxiety for his special fate. Him disappeared, what did the rest matter?

And the sense of nothingness which had seized her by the throat that morning touched her again, more glacial than before. Nothing! No longer anything! Yes, the war was an unheard-of misfortune; but the war had captivated one like a drama of unequalled interest. The drama might go on henceforth; she would not go to witness it. She had gone to it only for one actor, who, having played his part, had disappeared. She too would disappear.

Odette slept and spoke as in a dream. She fell into delirium; insisted on going with her husband, saying: "*If I had known*, I would not have let you go one step." He seemed to reply to her, alluding to a grave wound which the commandant had re-

ceived. She would repeat: "The commandant's leg? . . . Oh, let them touch you once, you! I am here. . . . I am here to care for you, my love. . . ." And she awoke with a start.

"He is dead, Rose! Ah, Rose, how fortunate you are!"

"But my husband is fifty years old, Odette!"

"Oh, if my husband had only been sixty!"

Simone de Prans and Mme. de Blauve came again in the afternoon.

"Your husband, Odette, fell like a hero; there is no more beautiful death."

"There is no beautiful death."

"Yes, there is!"

"It is easy for you to talk."

"No, Odette, you don't consider that everything is changed."

"One's heart, too?"

"Yes, one's heart, too. Many among us pass for hard-hearted and inhuman, but everything now appears from another point of view."

"Love is always love."

Odette, whose sense of hearing was extremely acute, overheard a low-voiced conversation in which Simone was saying how well her dear Pierrot was looking, and she swooned again.

The rest of the day was only one lamentation, an inarticulate and continuous moaning.

The following days were no better. The physician dreaded meningitis.

Human beings are often weak in the face of great catastrophes when they are governed only by their natural sentiments. Yet Rose, who was in all things natural, remained completely devoted to Odette.

"It is easier," said Mme. de Blauve, "to nurse a gravely wounded man than a woman distracted with grief, for whom there is nothing to do, to whom there is nothing to say."

The first two days of Odette's grief were as nothing in comparison with those that followed. She uttered no sound except to moan; she fell into delirious slumbers, had hours of furious insomnia, nightmares, hal-

lucinations, attacks of hysterics. At last came the period of confidences, with torrents of tears.

Among Odette's friends, some had not been pleased because they had not been admitted to her room the first day; others were forgetting everything in their dominant desire to obtain a place as nurse in a hospital. Some of these, having succeeded in compassing their wishes, came at last, and were not denied entrance to the sick-room, by reason of the costume that they wore. At first it seemed as if they might harm Odette by the lamentable scenes which they described. These nurses delighted in employing new, technical words, which they had taken pains to learn by heart, like so many schoolgirls. But Odette would murmur: "All your unhappy ones, with their surgical operations —they are alive, after all." And she would think to herself: "Mine is dead." What answer could be made to that?

Odette received heaps of letters, whose eloquence overwhelmed without touching her. She deemed all their expressions exag-

gerated, and yet she could not say that they rang false; they spoke of France, of glory and honor; hardly did they make allusion to her love, which to her was all.

She was beginning to get up, to come and go about her apartment. It made things worse. Every place, every article, reminded her of Jean. He used to sit in that chair; he had loved to play with that little ornament. Before his photographs, in the drawing-room, she succumbed once more. Here he was in tennis-costume, so graceful, so lithe, so beautiful; there in house dress, that velvet jacket that she had so often encircled with her arms. She would walk through the rooms trying to breathe the faint odors of a perfume which he might have left there. She would sink down upon the divan where once there had been room for him. . . . And she started with a sudden thrill when the shadow of Amelia formed a halo-surrounded image against the fixed curtain of the glass door. In the old days, when he came in, a great shadow would spread thus behind the yellow silk, and suddenly his tall form would

rise above the curtain, and his kind smile would appear through the glass. . . . Then she would listen for the sound of a key in the door. No one would ever again enter that door by means of a key. . . .

As she was opening, in a drawer, the box of his favorite cigars and would fain have lost herself in the odor which brought before her the image of her man, a telegram was brought to her. She tore it open mechanically, all news being indifferent to her. It was from Mlle. de Blauve, a girl of fourteen, and announced that her father, Commandant de Blauve, had died upon the field of honor. Her mother had been for the last few days a nurse at Rheims, her natal city, under bombardment. The three little De Blauve girls were alone at home with the governess, the two older brothers being in Jersey at school.

For the first time since her bereavement Odette was obliged to think of others. She closed the box of cigars, and thought of that house in the Avenue d'Iena that she knew so well, of those charming little girls, henceforth orphaned, the eldest of whom was so

calmly acquitting herself of the duties of courtesy.

"I must go there," she said, and called her maid to dress her. Her mourning dress had been brought home the day before yesterday, but she had not so much as tried it on. Now for the first time she put on her clothes without a thought of her appearance. She took a carriage and went to the Avenue d'Iena.

III

SHE was expecting to find consternation in a family crushed by their fate, and during the drive she reflected with astonishment that it was not altogether painful to her to visit people in grief; in her inmost heart she would rather meet the little de Blauve girls mourning, unhappy, than her consolatory friends, overflowing with kind and beautiful words, but not personally sorrowing. "It is not the sight of happiness that consoles us in our sorrows," she said to herself, "but to come into touch with a grief that is like our own."

The little de Blauves were not yet in black. The eldest wept a little when Odette kissed her with flowing tears—for Odette was thinking of her own grief—but the little girls were not at all prostrated, and there was even something radiant in their expression.

"What is it all about, dear children?" asked Odette.

Then they clapped their hands and said that their brother had just landed from his island and was up-stairs washing himself, and that he had received his mother's permission to enlist.

"To enlist!" exclaimed Odette. "Why, how old is he, the poor little fellow?"

"He is almost seventeen," said the eldest girl. "Papa is dead, he must replace him."

"And what does the big brother say to that?"

"Oh, he is delighted. He had begged to enlist as soon as mobilization was declared, but papa would not consent; he said: 'You will go with your class, when the time comes; it will not be long.'"

The big brother appeared, coming downstairs. He was a fine boy, delicate, surprisingly like his mother's portrait, painted in her youth, which hung above the great sofa. He rushed past like a bomb, exclaiming: "I must hurry to the recruiting-office!" No more was said about the dead father, and yet Odette knew that he was adored by all his family. Only to the governess, a confidential person well on in years, did Odette say a word about the event.

"It is a great honor," said the governess.

"Do they know how he was killed?"

"A bomb, which at the same time killed seventeen men who were near him."

It was fearlessly said in the presence of the children. Not one of the little ones showed the least emotion, while Odette shuddered through her whole body. She asked after the mother.

"Mama writes that the mortars send a regular hail; she is almost deafened with them. The noise disturbs her in her work. They jump, at times, as over a skipping-

rope, she writes. . . . She has also some Boches to wait upon her; did you know?"

And that was all. Odette looked at the dead man's portrait, opposite that of the Red Cross nurse, who was jumping, at this moment, at the sound of the marmites, and had just sent her young son to the firing-line, casting at least one more de Blauve into the furnace that had consumed his father. Monsieur de Blauve had not been painted in uniform; he showed only the good face of a clever and kindly man. It must have been in all tranquillity, without uttering a single grand word, that he had prepared his whole family for the eventualities of war; and his children, to the last one, were as ready to die as to go on a walk, or to church.

IV

ODETTE went away disconcerted. Not a word had been said about her Jean, who also had died heroically. But what had they said about the other hero, Commandant de Blauve, whose death had brought her there?

Men disappear; they are replaced; a memory of them remains, which is henceforth called "honor," and which does not admit of emotion. That was precisely what certain of her friends had already said to her. They had seemed to know that in advance, but Odette —no. She thought, as she returned home, of that bloody sunset over the sea, upon which she had gazed at Surville on August 1, and during which she had had the impression that she was entering a new world.

She found three letters in the vestibule; one, belated, from a friend in the country, who had only just heard of the death of Lieutenant Jacquelin, and who "complimented" her, basing her consolation upon "the honor with which she saw her adorned." The others were from strangers charged to announce to her that the husband of a friend who lived in Versailles, and that of another in Bourg-la-Reine, had just been killed.

Odette sank down upon the divan, her head feeling bruised as if she had bumped it against the wall; killed, killed—then there

were dead men everywhere? And she felt a dark rancor toward all those fatal events that fell upon her so furiously to disturb her grief, her personal grief.

She saw again those three men of whose loss she had been told that very day—in a single half-day—Commandant de Blauve, a magnificent man, a man without a blot, "a type of Plutarch" as he had been called, always with the added words, "characters such as his were no longer made"; then Jacques Graveur, him of Versailles, a good comrade of Jean's, one who never made an ado about anything, and passed for none too serious; it appeared that he had saved his whole company by coolness and the sacrifice of himself; Louis Silvain, he of Bourg-la-Reine, had brought his captain in upon his shoulders, across two hundred metres of open ground under a hail of grape-shot, had come within three metres of his trench, when a ball passed through his body—but the officer was saved. He had been, in ordinary life, a big fellow, with no other occupation than to haunt the theatres, play at the races, and

drink cocktails at the bars. . . . Such different figures, suddenly united in a similar act, for which some of them had from all time been prepared, the others not at all—the strangeness, the incomprehensibility of it all!

She must write letters of condolence—she, who had received so many! While she was writing to the others she was thinking especially of her Jean; she felt a certain fascination in writing of grief; she dwelt upon it too much at length; it would be apparent to the wives to whom she wrote that she was thinking only of herself. . . . But each of them would have done the same, and would forgive her.

All through the day the memory of Jean shook off from her the haunting thought of the three other dead men. She consulted a map of the Touring Club of which she had sometimes made use with her husband in their automobile drives. The spot where Jean had fallen was not far from a highway over which they had often driven. "Perhaps I saw one day the very spot where his body is lying to-day. . . ." Then followed endless

despairing reveries. How had she not foreseen the possibility of the event—of the war, at least? Yet war had often been discussed in her presence, at the time of the alarms of Agadir, of Casablanca, even of Tangier, when she was a young girl. Then things were possible, things which perhaps might happen to-morrow, of which people were talking to-day, and to which her mind had been hermetically closed? War, war! She used to know old people who talked about it; yes, because they had seen it. And they were tiresome. Young people didn't believe in such things. She tried to excuse herself; then she pronounced herself guilty. Why had they usually avoided people who talked of serious things? And why had they considered as clever those who ridiculed everything? Suddenly she thought of "Monsieur's linen," "Monsieur's wardrobe," of all those belongings of *his* which would never again be used, never. . . . Should she go on leaving them all in their places? Should she do away with them? Or should she put them all away in a closet, a reliquary?

She was at that point in her reflections when Amelia entered, in tears:

"The son of the concierge, madame!"

"Well, what?"

"He too, madame!"

Then the details; the unlucky fellow had been buried alive in an upheaval caused by a bomb, and had been dug out only too late. And Amelia began to talk of her husband, as if it had been he who was buried alive.

When a few days passed without tidings of more deaths, all the women grew calm and began to hope. When a man whom they knew was killed, each one saw in him her husband, her father, her cousin, her son; all the men were wept for in advance in the person of the one who had fallen. If any one had said to these women: "But there are thousands falling every day, thousands!" they would have opened their eyes wide, only partly terrorized, for they had not yet become accustomed to the new condition of things. The one who should maintain that the war would not be over in a few weeks

would be considered a bad patriot, or an ill-timed jester.

The next morning a new catastrophe; Pierre de Prans, otherwise Pierrot, he who had brought the news of Jean's death, had been brought to Val-de-Grâce hospital in a very alarming condition. His orderly, a fine fellow, who was wounded at the same time, was as good as dead. Pierrot had a bullet in the breast, one lung laid bare, and a broken arm. His orderly had stanched his wounds under a violent bombardment, filling up the enormous cavity with bandages snatched from the dead who surrounded them, then both had remained for six hours, their heads in a vile-smelling hole under a paving-stone, their bodies hidden by bushes. In the course of the night, hearing the French language spoken, they had kicked with their feet and the stretcher-bearers had drawn them out, both still living.

The narrative of these particulars produced a worse effect upon Odette than tidings of death; the more as some one had the lightness to say in her presence: "Much

better to be shot dead at an unexpected moment than to endure such long and cruel agony."

"That is a fine idea!" retorted Odette. "Much better to be alive than dead."

Notwithstanding the sadness of these visits of friends when there was always some new death to weep for, deaths which had occurred under the most frightful circumstances, Odette felt that no other sorrow was equal to her sorrow; and she detested them all, not as losses hateful to endure, not as making part of a national calamity the like of which had never been before, but as unwelcome events intruding themselves between her and her own grief. She desired to be alone with her sorrow, and she resolved henceforth to know nothing of all the rest.

One idea possessed her during several days: to see the place where Jean lay buried. Oh! if she could also see that where he received his death-blow! She appealed to three or four influential persons of her acquaintance, hung over the telephone. What she asked was to the last degree impossible.

Word came to her from the Minister that it would be easier for her to go to Berlin, passing through Switzerland after procuring the necessary papers, than to reach her husband's tomb, near as it was. Then it seemed to her that the government, even more than death, had robbed her of her husband by means never practised before, the refined cruelty of which had been invented for her alone.

V

HER old friend, La Villaumer, had come to make her a brief visit of condolence. He was the only man of their former group of intimates left in Paris, because of his years. Now he came to see her again.

"I do not come seeking to console you, my friend. If I am making a mistake, turn me to the door. In my mind there is no consolation for you; you are an unfortunate woman. You must not ask much of life, do you see? You have known happiness. To most people happiness is unknown. Let those to whom it

is a stranger deceive themselves with words and attitudes; as for you, weep for all you have lost; weep; what you have lost is worth all tears."

"Thank you, my friend; do not feel that you are obliged to make a heroine of me, you of all others! You know, of all others, that I am not a heroic soul, but simply a woman who loves."

"You are the purest woman whom I have known, in the sense that you are the most natural. You were born in a terrestrial paradise, and until now you have lived in one. You have not been put outside the gate for some misdeed by the angel with the fiery sword; a hurricane has arisen and devastated the garden."

"But I am none the less outside of the gate!"

"I recognize that. There would be no use in seeking to deny it, and it is all in vain to say to you that if others are less vividly aware of being outside the gate it is because they never lived in the garden, like you."

"But they tell me that everything is changed."

"They are right, and you see it clearly because you are outside of Eden, which you had never left before. It is only that some of them accept the change quickly because they were prepared for it, and others because they are less sensitive than you."

"Then, if such a change exists, does that mean that I should cease to mourn my husband?"

"No; but the day will come when you will mourn him more. Remember what I say: you will mourn him more. That is the way in which you will take your part in the change."

"More!" ejaculated Odette. "Is it possible? I do not understand you."

"I mean by 'more' another manner of mourning, which you will doubtless find more endurable. Let us not talk more about it now, but keep in mind what I have said."

She shrank more and more from society, till she could endure neither news nor the

face of a friend. She caused herself to be denied at the door—forbade her maid to speak to her of the war, even to bring in the newspapers. She wished to hear nothing.

Then Paris became odious to her because she could not keep herself sufficiently in retirement. Since she was not permitted to go and stretch herself upon Jean's tomb, like a faithful dog, she decided to seek a refuge where she could think only of Jean, weep for him in solitude, live only in his memory, stun herself with her own grief, give herself body and soul to this grief from which no earthly power had the right to tear her.

She thought of returning to Surville, where Jean had bidden her good-by, where she had spent those last weeks with him, those beloved days of the end of the world. To find herself there in present circumstances would be atrocious pain; so much the better! There was only one sort of torture that she feared; that which should forbid her to live in intimate union with the memory of Jean. To suffer, to suffer even to martyrdom, to the martyrdom which Jean's death was

causing her, this was the greatest good for which she could ask.

Odette set out for Surville.

VI

IT was the end of October. The war, still violent and deadly along all that line of conflict which was called the battle of the Aisne, was becoming more terrible in the north, and was being carried over into Belgium, as at the beginning. Universal anguish, for a time checked by the victory of the Marne, was as acute as in the first days. Surville, on the seashore, could not but be deserted and sad at this season. The Hôtel de Normandie closed, the public houses that were open far from comfortable, the best way to be alone and not hear war talk from morning till night was to rent a small villa. A pavilion was recommended; it was separated from the street by a row of poplars with yellowing foliage and a narrow grass-plot where two pergolas were in summer covered with climbing roses. At this season the dull melancholy

of this abode was accentuated by the silence of the dead town. Odette found that it suited her. No sooner had she arrived than she had made a pilgrimage under the closed windows and drawn-down blinds of the room that she had occupied with Jean. The wind was blowing from the country, driving the heavy clouds out to sea; the old Casino, once so gay, was boarded up; at the door there still hung a poster announcing the races. Odette followed the alley, passed over the dunes between the deserted tennis-courts, and went down to the beach, where she could indulge in the bitterness of unmingled grief.

This was where she had planted her tent and lived with Jean through a fortnight of sunny days, in utter abandonment to a delight that arose from the earth or fell down from the magnificent sky. Children had been playing about; excited little dogs had been barking to coax them to throw a pebble into the sea. They had ceased their indolent repose only to plunge into the sea, swimming side by side with delight.

To-day the beach was abandoned, and seemed to stretch away, gray and monotonous, to the end of the world. Odette seated herself under the shelter of the dune and uttered the beloved name of Jean. The raging wind carried it, like a flake of foam, toward that distant Havre where a number of transports were lying in the roadstead. The coachman who brought her from the train had pointed them out to her: they had brought over British troops; an average of fifty to fifty-five vessels was arriving every day. The war! Here, too, here again, when she had hardly left the train, she had been reminded of it.

Nevertheless, the hours passed and no one spoke of it, to her at least. The monotonous sound of the sea soothed her, and the sea, notwithstanding the troop-ships over there, seemed like something grand, entirely foreign to all the human butchery. Odette rested her eyes on the limitless plain, ever restless and sad. But this sadness was allied to her own, and at the same time something immense, majestic, and superhuman seemed

to enter the depths of her still rudimentary consciousness of the dawn of a new time. She would have remained there for hours if the approach of evening had not rendered intolerable the sense of despair suggested by the scene, and if the rain had not begun to fall in torrents.

Odette took one of the paths leading back to the town.

Hardly had she reached it when she was surprised to see through the driving wind and rain that buffeted her, many illuminated buildings where she had expected only the shadows of a sleeping city. That was the Casino, which she had lately seen shut up by boards! And that was the Grand Hotel, all twinkling with light! She had to round the corner of the latter to reach her cottage, and by degrees as she approached it she saw a swarm of human beings, became aware of a commotion in the vast building which had seemed so funereal. Men with bandaged heads, with arms in slings, men walking on crutches; and the white head-dresses and red crosses of nurses; it was a hospital. The wind brought its odors to her—the smell of tinc-

ture of iodine, of cooking and an indescribable unsavoriness.

She drew near, passed beneath the windows. The sight was not so heart-breaking as she would have expected. The nurses, some of them young, wore a smile; if certain wounded men were stretched out, inert, others, seated on their beds, were quietly chatting, calling across to one another; a great burst of boyish laughter took her by surprise, while at the same moment she saw, close-pressed to the window-pane, directly under the electric light, the pitiful, waxen face of a sort of Lazarus rising from the tomb. She became aware that the other building, opposite, was equally crowded; she saw at the door an orderly in uniform, and the inscription on white linen: "Supplementary Hospital." She had thought to flee from the war; everything was bringing it to her. The pavilion that she had selected, with its green lawns, its poplars, its pergolas, was situated not far from these hospitals. All day long she would see only men who had been in the war!

Somewhat disheartened, she returned

home. It was not what she had expected to find here. Two telegrams were awaiting her; she opened them listlessly—no news could be of serious moment to her. Both of them announced the death of young men whom she knew intimately, old friends of her husband; the first, an aviator crushed under his machine; the second, killed on the banks of the Yser.

The next morning several letters brought to her details of this twofold loss. The first of these young men, whom she remembered to have had at her house not three months before, had joined in aerial conflict with an enemy machine, at an altitude of two thousand metres; despairing of overcoming it by shots of grape, he had dashed upon it, crushing his own screw, but had also seen his adversary wrecked as they fell to earth together. It was one of the first exploits of the kind; its effect upon the imagination was great. The other victim of the day, an officer by profession, after having his shoulder crushed and his useless arm bound to his body by withes, had continued for an hour

to command his company, until a bomb had scattered him in fragments.

Odette shuddered. The heroism touched her, as it touched every one; but these fine deeds, these multiplied deaths, overshadowed the case of her husband, blotted it out; the death of Lieutenant Jacquelin was fading from the general memory; other deaths were making more of a stir than his; as the war became more and more furious it seemed to relegate its earlier stages to a long-past time, somewhat inferior to the later tragedy. Lieutenant Jacquelin had been killed in the first days of the war, of a war still fought in old-fashioned way. The miseries of the trenches under the autumn rains was another sort of war, one which alone seemed to be true war. The headlong rush of the enemy on the Yser, of which people were better informed than of the earlier invasion at the Marne, arrested and absorbed the public mind. Odette felt this, and though she was determined that no thought of glory should mingle with her grief, the idea of glory and of the gigantic struggle that was

going on did penetrate her mind in spite of herself, by reason of the diminution which the prestige of her own hero was suffering. She had never dreamed of finding a cause of pride in what he had done; one single thought had absorbed her: that her Jean, her love, was dead. In her wounded pride she was hurried into saying to herself: "He died nobly, he had a beautiful death, *he too!*" Yet the universal chorus seemed to reply: "Since him, others have done better."

She wrote to her newly widowed friends in words of exaggerated praise, affecting not to speak at all of her personal sorrow. It was a gratuitous effusion of temper, for the widows did not find her praises at all extravagant, and never observed Odette's reserve as to her own case.

She decided not to leave the house, that she might see nothing, hear nothing, learn nothing. For a while she even thought of notifying the post-office not to forward her correspondence; but she was always hoping that the Minister would send her a permit

to visit Jean's grave. Jealously she shut herself up with the memory of her husband.

Everything irritated her; everything was odious to her; everything seemed to conspire to raise between her and the beloved memory a barrier of bleeding corpses, a screen upon which were portrayed horrors invented by a satanic imagination, together with sentences of exalted morality unknown to her and whose new radiance blinded her.

Stamping her foot, tearing the handkerchief with which she was stanching her tears, she declared to herself that she would henceforth live only for Jean and by him. She kissed the photographs that she had brought with her. She stretched herself upon a lounge, engulfing herself in the torturing memory of him. For one day, several days, a week, perhaps longer, she would be able to live upon only the thought of him. She would open neither letters nor despatches that might come; if she was late with her condolences, her congratulations, what did it matter?

The idea of military glory entered her

mind and suggested to her the hope of erecting a monument to her husband. She was caressing the thought when her maid entered her room like a gust of wind.

"Madame, the wounded! the wounded! Swarms of them! In automobiles, on trucks; it appears that there are twice as many for Sousville, and the train has carried as many more to Houlgate and Cabourg!"

Amelia threw open the windows. The train of wounded men was passing the house. Odette dared not forbid herself to look at it.

Autos were rumbling by, some of them covered, others displaying to the light of day a heap of men, motionless, bandaged, covered with clay, an agglutinated mass of flesh in which all individuality if not all life seemed to be held in suspense, a cart-load of humanity: not a single man but a mass of bloody pulp in which the suffering that it covered must be a common suffering. Then came a truck, two trucks, three. They were great drays across which were placed stretchers, and on these stretchers were ex-

tended what they call the bedded wounded, those whose legs are broken, or already amputated, or dreadfully crushed, those fever-stricken from projectiles received in the body, those with cloven skulls, hastily bound together. They were marine gunners, foot-soldiers, blacks; tall, handsome, Moroccans with brown skins. Distinguished from all the others by excess of ill fortune, they were stretched out, straight and rigid like corpses placed in order, at equal distances, upon the marble slabs of a morgue. The trucks going at a walk and carrying the most seriously wounded, at each check, each halt, each starting again, one could hear hollow moans; sometimes the outcry of a Moroccan, sharp like the voice of a child or a woman, would make you catch your breath, and the country folk, crowded along the sidewalks, would whimper as if they themselves were being tortured.

Amelia, who in the beginning had been chattering without ceasing, was now suffocated with sobs, and her elbows upon the window-ledge was weeping silently over this

procession. Odette, hidden at another window, wept like her servant, incapable either of tearing herself away from the sight or of controlling her emotion.

At length, having closed the windows, the two women found themselves face to face with wet eyes. Amelia said:

"It is better to be dead than alive."

Never had they experienced such emotions in Paris, where they thought themselves nearer the war because of the number of kilometres between them and the front, or because they heard men deemed well informed telling contradictory news from morning to night. Here in this remote and quiet corner they had now touched the very relics of the hecatomb. The eyes alone tell the truth; words are a small matter.

Amelia could not remain still; she ran to the hospital after the procession. Never in her life had she seen anything so exciting.

On her return she said that she could hardly recognize the entrance of the Grand Hotel, whither she had gone a few months before to carry notes from Monsieur or

Madame to M. X or M. Y who were dead now, like Monsieur.

She brought back much information. The wounded who came that morning were from the Department of the North, where a frightful battle had been raging for weeks. "Some of them talk, madame; some of them say nothing; their eyes break your heart, like poor, sick dogs that glance at you as if ashamed and pretend to be asleep." "I could see from where I was," she went on after a little, "the surgeon as he appeared to be, all in white, with a cap like a cook and bare arms; he received them at the door and sorted them out, sending them up-stairs, down-stairs, to the right, the left, pestered by the nurses, who begged for them."

But Odette had not seen them entering the hospital, and this did not interest her. She was pursuing her own thoughts.

"There was one in the procession," she said, "one that was lying down, who was so pale, poor boy! He will not go far."

She had vowed to herself that she would not go out; she would remain with her grief

the whole day, the whole week. But immediately after luncheon she put on her hat and went to wander around the hospital.

A hedge separated the street from the great court in which there was still a circular clump of trees surrounded with withered summer flowers; opposite, above another hedge, the vines in a charming flower-garden were reddening on the pergolas. Everything bore the impress of a time of display and enjoyment, and she felt that decorations like these were henceforth antiquated, absurd.

Odette knew already, through Amelia, the disposition of each part of the hospital, whose interior hum she could hear from without. She knew that one flight up, at the first turn, were the typhoids, nursed by a Sister who for twelve years past, wherever she might be sent, had done nothing else than care for typhoids, and go to the nearest church to put up a little prayer. She knew the situation of the staircase leading to the basements, where the food was brought in and the dead carried out. She knew that at a

corner of the building looking upon the sea was the operating-theatre, visible from without. And in fact, passing by it, she perceived a group of white-robed men and women, their sleeves turned back, leaning over something or some one. Then she fled toward the sea like a coward and was ashamed. In reality, this assemblage of suffering creatures at once repelled and attracted her, producing a complex sentiment, unfamiliar and incongruous.

From afar she looked at the building and its surroundings. At the sight of this countryside, these villas, these hotels, the memory of the past summer overpowered her, and at the same time she experienced a cruel dispelling of her memories of the past summer. Meanwhile she stood there as if hypnotized by the great house of suffering. On the ground floor, through the glazed verandas she discerned a constant coming and going of white caps. And she thought of the labors which those hundred and fifty new arrivals of the morning must necessitate. She was seized with timidity at the thought of ap-

proaching this august place. Before it she seemed to herself a profane person, idle, gloved, parasol in hand, her one interest her personal grief.

An unknown power held her motionless, kept her from going toward the sea, where she had hoped to meet her cruel and too-much loved memories, and yet forbidding her to return to that place of common suffering which she had not made her own. While she stood there, hesitating on the levelled dune, she was shot through with an unaccustomed shiver, which frightened her.

As a pretext for again drawing near the place she told herself that she desired to see once more the poor boy whom she had seen lying so pale on his stretcher. Had they revived him? Sincerely, she would have loved to know. But how set about it? No sooner had she returned to the road that surrounded the glazed verandas than she lost courage to present herself as a curious stranger; men in bed, others sitting up, would stare at the newcomer, young and perhaps pretty under her crape veil.

She returned to her house much more agitated than if she had met any one, and let Amelia talk to her of all that she had learned concerning not only that hospital, but all the hospitals of the region. She remembered of all she heard only the name of a lady whom she had met in August at the Hôtel de Normandie, and who, it appeared, was nursing the wounded in the neighboring hospital, Madame de Calouas.

She shut herself up again, distrustful of the strange attraction that the city of suffering exercised over her. She talked to Jean's photograph, saying to it: "I will be only yours, think of nothing but of you." She read over again the books that they had read together; or rather, she pleased herself by telling herself that she had read these books with Jean. Or she walked in her little garden, making forty turns over the tour of the hedge-bordered alley, strewn with golden flakes which the poplars shed like rain. Sometimes she would pause before the latticed gate upon the road, amusing herself with counting the minutes that one might

stand there without seeing a single passer-by. One day she thought she recognized Mme. de Calouas hastening past on a bicycle, light and fleet as a dragon-fly. And she felt a desire to see her again, not on her own account, for she had left upon her only a vague impression, but to talk to her or hear her talk of Jean.

Vainly she watched for her. She even permitted herself to walk out, in the hope of meeting Mme. de Calouas.

"But, madame," said Amelia, "it is very easy. Every one knows when these ladies come back and forth to the hospital. Madame has only to walk up and down before the great court."

It was not till the following Sunday, at eleven o'clock mass, that Odette met Mme. de Calouas and spoke to her.

"What!" exclaimed Mme. de Calouas, "you here! What hospital do you belong to?"

Odette thought that the nurse had made a mistake, intending to say: "Where are you staying?"

"I am at the Elizabeth pavilion."

"Is that the new auxiliary post opened for contagious diseases?"

"It is just a little villa," said Odette simply. "It is large enough for me alone."

"And what are you doing there, good God?"

"I came here," said Odette, "that I might mourn for my husband in peace."

Mme. de Calouas assumed a suitable expression, but made no reply. Odette continued:

"He was killed in the end of September, at the head of his company, going out from the village——"

"Yes, I heard," said Mme. de Calouas. "I ought to have sent you a card; but in times like these——"

"You yourself are in mourning," observed Odette.

"Oh—I! I have lost my husband, my two brothers, my uncle the colonel, several cousins—" She waved her hand with a gesture which signified: "They are past counting!" Before leaving Odette she added:

"Come to see me at the hospital, from eight o'clock to noon, and from two to four. From four to six I have another service at the Red Cross, close by. I will show you things. Come."

For a long time Odette hesitated. Again she shut herself up with her adored memories. She was irritated that Mme. de Calouas had not said a word about that exquisite man who was her Jean, and whom she had met at the hotel. When she went out it was precisely at an hour when she knew Mme. de Calouas to be at her hospitals. When the sea-wind was too strong she would walk in the dull streets of the deserted summer city, a pleasure resort in which the word "pleasure" had become strange and unfitting. The streets crossed at right angles; nearly all of them were bordered by hedges beyond which one could see a garden, the wire cage of a tennis-court, a Norman villa, and no one. Often, the whole length of her walk she met only one human being, a big man, almost impotent, whose duty it was to sweep up the dead leaves—an absurd duty since

the wind scattered them as fast as he swept, and the trees shed down behind him another layer of little golden, rolling, dead things.

Sometimes, walking daringly, Odette crossed the long terrace, and braving the wind went as far as to the sea.

At certain hours the beach was covered with men under treatment. You recognized them by the slings that supported their arms, by their crutches, their bandaged heads, not often by their uniforms, of which they preserved only odd parts. They wore old jackets, knitted waistcoats, trousers brought forth from old Norman wardrobes. Some of the men limped, others wearily dragged their feet along the sand; those who had legs wrestled with one another, ran races, played like children. They delighted in the edge of the sea, gathering shells, and regaling themselves with the slimy flesh of cockles. Some of them cast a too expressive glance upon the young woman, with an awkward word which at another time would have made her smile.

It was an amazing group of tatterdemalions; within the memory of man no eye had ever looked upon such a sight. It excited compassion; and yet almost every man in particular had gained, without trying, the manly merit of always seeming to be in good humor.

Whenever she saw them Odette felt moved, and at the same time somewhat jealous. *He* had not been washed, bandaged, ministered to, nor even clothed in rags; *he* had not been able to drag his mangled limbs along the seashore; *he* had been killed outright. She would say to herself: "Perhaps one of these soldiers knew him, perhaps he saw him fall; he could tell me the details, could describe his last days, his last hour, his last minute." And she grew faint at the possibility of asking them, of learning.

The low tide, the stormy sky, the wind, the grayish hillsides, the transports on the horizon, always this immense deserted beach, these wretched relics of the war, and she, disconsolate widow, imploring the wind to snatch her away and destroy her in its

eddies! The constant reminders of the past, the sight of these same places, natural background of all the pleasant things of life! The thought of that water which had bathed the limbs of Jean, and of the August sun, and the restless multitude, gay and elegant, whom the many-colored sweaters set off like a profusion of tulips; the movement of automobiles, the music of the orchestra! Her heart ached at these contrasts even more than it had done in Paris. The solitude, the approaching winter, and the near contact with suffering aroused in her an unwelcome agitation. The restless air, dark with cawing crows, brought a bitter taste to her lips, and yet aroused in her an indescribable sense of splendor.

VII

NOTHING less than the thought of meeting Mme. de Calouas at church on the following Sunday before she had paid her promised visit could have induced Odette to cross the threshold of the hospital.

She went on Saturday, between two and four o'clock. An orderly wearing a corporal's bands detained her as if her hand-bag might conceal incendiary bombs, but was softened on hearing the name of Mme. de Calouas, and led her to room 74. Odette was kept a long time standing at the door of room 74; at last a doctor came out, carrying a case of instruments. He was followed by Mme. de Calouas, who said:

"It is too bad, dear madame! I beg you to excuse me; one of my patients detained me. But now I am at your service; just let me change my blouse before taking you to see the wards."

Her change of costume was soon made, and she took Odette to a neighboring room where a very young nurse and two military orderlies were with great difficulty holding down a patient in an attack of tetanus. The sick man's head with its contracted jaws and inflexible neck reminded her of certain "attractions" of the waxworks; the upheaved body, forming an arc from head to heels, was as rigid and unyielding as the

arch of a bridge. Odette turned pale, and Mme. de Calouas said:

"You lack training. See this child who is nursing him! She isn't twenty years old—a mere girl."

They passed into another room, from which exhaled a pestilential odor.

"Gangrene from the gas," said Mme. de Calouas. "It is not a perfume for the pocket-handkerchief, far from it! But one gets accustomed to anything. With assiduous care and absolute asepsis we have saved a certain number of wounded who suffer from this complication. We are so fortunate here as to have a surgeon who is not in haste to use the knife."

In the long corridor nurses, for the most part young, were gliding or running. A priest, wearing his alb, was hastening to one of the rooms. Carried along by his speed, Mme. de Calouas entered after him, and Odette followed her.

It was a comfortable hotel bedroom, hung with brightly colored paper; there were two women in white, and on a clean white bed

lay a tall young man, uncovered, almost as white as the bed, from whose lips poured a stream of blood. He had received a fragment of shell in the sinus, had been operated upon that morning, and hemorrhage had set in—a stream white and red, unlike anything she had ever seen; it overwhelmed her with horror.

"You should apply a tampon," said Mme. de Calouas.

"The doctor is coming," replied one of the nurses.

They were both leaning over the white body; one was injecting serum into the stomach, the other was applying a syringe with ipecac to the thigh. The priest was standing at the cadaverous feet, anointing them with the sacred oil. The doctor arrived and applied the proper tampons.

To Mme. de Calouas this was one of the normal cases which one meets on visiting a military hospital. Odette was making every effort to stand upright. She begged to go out in the air. Mme. de Calouas smiled.

"It is war! And we are only in one of the

rear hospitals. There is no rain of shells here. Shall we visit the wards down-stairs, if you please?"

The vast wards were almost vacant at this hour, for many of the patients were out-of-doors.

"They recover rapidly, if you only knew! One can see the new flesh grow."

"And they return to the firing-line?" asked Odette.

"They must, indeed!"

A group of four convalescents was playing a game of cards on a bed. Others, stretched at length, were reading; several were sleeping, some were receiving friends. A photographer in a corner was taking pictures.

Beds and beds, and torn flesh, and perforated limbs, and members sawn off, and trepanned skulls! And the tetanus, the gangrene, the typhus, and that red torrent by which the soul of a man was taking flight, amid all that whiteness!

Odette felt as if she should die, and left the hospital. During all her visit one ques-

tion had been upon her lips: "Shall I find here any one who knew my husband?" What was it that kept her from uttering it? She could not have told how it was, but she had not so much as pronounced her husband's name. A weight had seemed to be crushing her during the whole time. She had felt overwhelmed by the new horror. The worst was that when at last she reached home she felt ashamed to weep for her own sorrow.

The fact also that all that human flesh had been ravaged for the same cause; that of those unhappy ones who were groaning, not one thought of blaming the cause; and that other fact that one part of humanity, upright and able, was bending with help over the other, gasping part, forced her to gather up her disordered thoughts and in the midst of her confusion to exclaim:

"Something is changed!"

That evening, at six o'clock, instead of wandering about the streets in heavy sadness, she went, as Mme. de Calouas had begged her to do, to evening prayer at the

Chapel of the Orphanage, in which the Red Cross was now installed. It was a convent chapel, reserved for nuns, the public being admitted only behind a sort of screen of carved wood, through which could be seen the orderly rows of Sisters and orphans, the altar and the lights. She found herself in the midst of valid soldiers; that is to say, such as by one means or another could move from place to place. There were bandaged heads, arms in slings, stiff or deformed legs, crutches. Odette was moved by the singing more than she could have believed. Suddenly sobs choked her, and she wept. The men turned toward this young woman in mourning whom they could hardly have helped noticing, and who kept on wiping her eyes. She was weeping from a natural need of weeping. She was weeping for Jean, but also she wept with great pity for all those lacerated bodies; and for the first time she realized that these men, or these fragments of men, had come from places where death and pain were of all things the most usual.

Mme. de Calouas heard and saw her, and

knew that Odette had come here to weep for her husband. As they went out she said to her:

"You loved him much, then?"

And by these words Odette realized that she had been weeping for an immeasurable loss, which had left her in a sense benumbed.

VIII

THIS did not last long, and as soon as she reached home she made honorable amends to Jean. She drove from her every thought except of him, denouncing the universal conspiracy against her beloved memories. What could she do to mitigate the misfortunes of others, however great and innumerable they might be? Those women who seemed to deny their own griefs filled her with a sort of dismay.

She passed hours of sleeplessness revolving these ideas, determining at whatever cost to master herself, and forget the whole distracted world. She fell asleep vowing hence-

forth to belong wholly to the memory of Jean.

Yet the next morning, Sunday, coming out of church, she found no rest till she had met Mme. de Calouas and asked her:

"Could I be of use to you at the hospital?"

"I was expecting you," Mme. de Calouas replied. "I would do nothing to bring you before the time; but I am glad that you wish to come. I will begin by taking you under my wing; for your initiation you shall be my helper. Does that suit you?"

"Of course. I do not know how to do anything."

"When will you come?"

"When you please."

"Well, I will leave you your Sunday. Or rather, come with me now, that I may at once get you received by the head doctor, and find a provisional cap and blouse for you. The rest will be for to-morrow morning."

Odette saw the head doctor; she tried on the nurse's costume which her friend would

lend to her until she could procure one; and at eight o'clock the next morning, after having signed an engagement, she entered the hospital, almost as if she was entering a convent.

At that hour the hired women were sponging the floors with wet cloths, and through the wards resounded the click of buckets set down, the metal handle falling against their sides. The floors exhaled moisture. The sea air, entering by the open windows, swept out the odor of the sick-room. Convalescent men were going to the lavatories; others were helping comrades with helpless arms to wash themselves upon their cots.

Odette asked for Mme. de Calouas, and found her before the twenty beds allotted to her. A dozen of them were occupied by seriously wounded men, who gazed upon the newcomer with embarrassing steadfastness. Mme. de Calouas led Odette to the room where dressings were done, passing through the whole ward, where sixty men were exchanging the morning greetings of the soldier, now rough, now amusing. She was,

above all, surprised that the nurses paid them no attention.

While giving instructions to her pupil Mme. de Calouas was busy disinfecting mugs, unrolling pieces of cotton and tearing them into bits, counting piles of compresses, tubes, drains. The room exhaled an odor of antiseptics, sweet and insipid.

They returned to the ward, and Mme. de Calouas made known to her each patient by name, with certain indications as to his case; she begged Odette to wash this or that one, to make the bed of an unfortunate who, with only one arm, could not do it alone.

"Be careful what you say to them," she whispered in her ear. "Remember that their estimate of you will depend upon your first words."

Odette observed that the patients gazed at her without once turning away their eyes. She won their approval by the first words she uttered, and by the gentleness with which she washed the faces of two or three helpless men, and she saw their expressions change. Those eyes so full of

agony, which make unpractised fingers tremble, were softened. Her hands were dexterous, her face attractive. There was one poor fellow whom she had to wash from head to foot, like a new-born baby, a difficult task for a beginner. When all was finished and he was wrapped in clean linen she was about to pass to another bed, when the patient said: "Wait, madame!" And she saw him painfully turn in his bed, raise his sheet, awkwardly stretch out a suffering arm in the attempt at any cost to reach the case that hung at the head of the bed. She held the linen bag within his reach, and he, hesitating, fumbling, blindly feeling among a litter of things, a knife, letters, bits of bread, succeeded in extracting two photographs, those of his wife and his two little children. He desired to reward the new nurse for her kind offices, and he did his best by introducing her to his little family. Deeply touched, Odette praised the wife and the two children, and thenceforward the poor fellow was her friend.

Mme. de Calouas came to say that the

stretcher-bearers were coming to carry "the thigh" to be dressed. Odette followed "the thigh." The new nurse was asked to cut the dressing. She broke into a cold perspiration; she thought the scissors were defective, and her remark provoked a smile from all the experts around; only the patient looked at her with an apprehension which seemed to paralyze her.

"You must learn to cut dressings," said Mme. de Calouas. "You will get used to it; just a knack."

Finally the steel succeeded in biting through the damp compresses. When they fell apart the wound appeared. It was an open fracture of the leg, whence exhaled the special sickening smell of osseous pus. The large wound spread open like a nightmare flower with thick petals, soft and viscid, covered with a creamy layer of dull old-rose color. They washed it; the patient gritted his teeth; now and again a cry escaped from the thin little brown face. When they looked at him he was brave enough to smile and say, "That's all right."

Odette was more ill than the wounded man. As on the previous evening, she asked that she might go out into the air, and when she stumbled at the door, turned pale, and was about to faint, the orderly, who understood these phenomena, with the help of a valid patient laid her all along upon a marble slab. It was only for a moment, and she returned to the room, saying, like the wounded man: "That's all right." The uninterrupted process of dressing made even her forget the incident. A kindly woman drew her into an embrasure and gave her a drop of cordial.

At that moment a man was being carried to the operating-room. He blustered a little as he addressed to his comrades the classic *au revoir* which may so well be an *adieu:* "I am going to my game of billiards!"

"Try to win, old fellow," they answered from all parts of the ward.

And, without flinching, Odette was present at "her" first operation.

She returned home at half past twelve, exhausted, but lighter in heart and satisfied with herself.

"Madame is pale," said Amelia. "Madame is the color of the lamp-shade when the lamp is lighted."

After luncheon she slept heavily for half an hour, and returned to the hospital. The afternoon was more calm, at least until the second visit of the head physician, before the men's six-o'clock meal. She made further acquaintance with her patients; she heard them talk about the war. She found occasion to say, "My poor husband was killed on the 22d of September," but it produced no great effect, none of those soldiers having known Lieutenant Jacquelin. Each told about what he had seen, and nothing else seemed to him to have a real existence. She was disappointed, but by their various touching stories of what they had been through, she was introduced to that war of which she had determined to know nothing since her husband was dead. The battles of the Yser, the sufferings of the combatants who had passed day after day in freezing water, the grotesque onslaughts of the Germans, the piles of dead under the ominous skies, set her imagination to work. Always

thinking of her husband, she saw him all alone in the face of those infuriated enemies, trampled down by them. . . . He had gone out with drawn sabre from his little village, at the head of his company, and he had been killed outright. Before the survivors of the Yser she no longer dared speak of the circumstance of the lieutenant's death, beautiful though it was. This war seemed to be enlarging, growing beyond measure great.

They were beginning to organize the hospital for the winter; certain persons insisted that the war would not be over in six months; others said with conviction: "Nor in eighteen months either!" But these were suspected of sowing demoralization. Yet the English were making preparations for three years! From her friend La Villaumer, who was still in Paris, Odette received letters in which he wrote:

"We are like children, sometimes gay, laughing and gamboling, at others howling, no one knows why. My dear friend, busy yourself with your work, and don't read the papers. As for me, there is something which

impresses me more than the monstrous movements of the German colossus: it is the soul of the colossus. It is *one;* it has only one purpose, which is the greatness of the German nation. It is a rudimentary sentiment, savage, primitive, barbarous, but how strong! We ourselves are fighting because we have been attacked, and also to defend ideas which do us the greatest honor: liberty, justice, and the like. We are animated by a very lively sentiment of the rights of man. We love humanity; they, the Germans, love Germany. How much more simple it is, and how it relieves them of all the scruples that hold us back! And yet, in the final issue, it is he who shall have triumphed by force who will lay down the moral values of the future."

Thus, uncertainty, admiration, confidence, scepticism, and a state of alarm were concurrently implanted in minds, and Odette, affected by them, like every one else, began from that day to be infected, as with the odor of the hospital, with this irritating compound.

Little by little it seemed to her that she no longer upheld herself, but that she let herself be carried away, borne along and guided by the life of the hospital. It was at once horrible and almost laughable. A place of pain, the perpetual reminder of enormities which the human brain could never have conceived, it was also an assemblage dominated by youth, which saves all. In the gaze of those prostrate wounded, gaze which had become of so much importance to her who passed and repassed along the bedsides, burned a flame disturbing and alluring, result of the burning away of something that could not be named. At times, one felt as if in certain of those wounded men one saw beings returned from the beyond. They had seen what nothing had prepared them to see, something that confused them, both their senses and their judgment. Some of them said: "It was hell!" Others, much more simple-minded, merely said: "One must have been there!" Certain of them, without imagination or memory, living entirely in the present moment, shut up with-

in themselves an unconscious gravity which was in strange contrast with their youthful natures. But in a general way a new nurse like Odette could aver:

"But the wounded are not sad!"

"Because," some one would reply, "they are all happy at not being dead."

Thus, day succeeded day, without softening Odette's personal sorrow, but as if shrouding it behind a mourning veil which covered all that she could imagine of earth's surface. Everything made her think of Jean, but she had not time to appear to be thinking of him, and she shrank from speaking of him.

She led a very active life. It would happen that just as she sat down at table, all alone in the evening in the Elizabeth pavilion, the door-bell would ring. It would be one of the volunteer employees, passing along on his bicycle to notify the nurses that a train of one hundred and twenty wounded men was announced to reach the station at eleven o'clock. By half past ten Odette, who would not take a nap, and who knew not what to

do at home, was already at the hospital, in her cap and blouse. The more zealous ones were there, and the more indolent ones as well, welcoming the opportunity to get together and gossip. The head physician was coming and going, opening and shutting doors; the doctors were arriving one by one; the surgeon, all in white, his sleeves turned back to the elbows, was talking with the women. The telephone-bell rang; it was the police commissioner sending word that the train was an hour late. A few persons were in despair; there were some whom the matter moved to laughter. Every one waited. And sometimes the train, instead of one hour, was two or three hours late. Resignation became general in proportion as reasons for impatience accumulated. In the great hall where they were all assembled some seated themselves on anything they could find, others lay down upon stretchers. Bright conversation grew dim with the lights. White-robed women, going up or down stairs on tiptoe, seemed like angelic apparitions. Through the partitions came the heavy

breathing of sleeping men. Suddenly the ringing of a bell startled every one; the train was drawing into the station at last. The lights were turned up. Ten minutes later the first automobiles were sounding in the court. The double-leaved doors were thrown wide, notwithstanding the cold, the stretcher-bearers rushed out, and in a moment, contrasting with their rapid bounds, came slowly the wounded soldiers, bleeding, bearded, covered with earth, wan, exhausted; some of them half-naked, some with frozen feet, upheld or carried by sturdy fifteen-year-old lads. All were silent, a religious respect hushed the words upon the lips. This torn flesh, these rags of French uniform, wrought in the mind of every being not utterly insensible a change in his idea of the pathetic; something of the atmosphere of the firing-line entered and asepticized every heart.

The next morning the sense of familiarity returned. But in that one hour of the dark winter night, while the surgeon, bending over each victim, was asking him almost

tenderly: "And you, my child?"—something august, an exhalation of the colossal human sacrifice, penetrated into this commonplace old hotel hall, sanctifying it for all time to come. And not one of those men or women who had been there, however advanced the hour of the night, however visible the fatigue on all their faces, but was glad for having been there.

Whence came these wounded men? From Ypres, from Arras, from Notre-Dame de Lorette. The names called up all that any one knew, through newspapers and private talk, of those charnel-houses whose image the imagination refuses to harbor, upon which those who have escaped from them keep silence.

Odette, soapy brush in hand, forcing back all repugnance, doing as others did, was helping to soothe agonies which humanity seems never before to have known or dreamed of. The most shocking duties no longer repelled her. The very effort which she was compelled to make, by the contrast between what she was seeing and doing and what

life had formerly offered her, pressed the character of the catastrophe to her mind which lacked capacity to conceive of it. "Is it, then, so great?" she would wonder. And even: "Is there after all anything great?" For no soul in the world had taught her this. The inevitable contrast with her past life, all for herself, for her individual satisfaction, seemed to dishonor her memories, even of happiness, making them almost trivial. This, indeed, was the opinion of Mme. de Calouas, but not that of Amelia, whom in her solitude it became sometimes necessary to oppose.

"Madame adopts the ideas of those around her," the maid would say; "it is all very well, but Madame may believe me: the good time, and the true time, was before all this, when the poor men were not preparing to be made into hash."

IX

WHO would have believed it a year ago? Odette took the inclination to follow to the cemetery the pitiful funerals of dead sol-

diers, not because it offered her a pretext for a walk into the country in the free air, for she had done that—she, so susceptible to cold—all through the black winter. But before everything else she was thinking that she had not followed her husband to the grave. After all that she had endured, still reverent of century-old rites, not to have followed the body of her husband in a funeral car to his last abode seemed to her to have failed in a sovereign duty. Alas! her husband's body had been carried in no funeral-car, no one had followed him to the grave! She did not permit herself to dwell upon these heartrending details, but in accompanying the mortal remains of the soldiers she felt that she was to a certain degree acquitting herself of an indispensable duty that had not been rendered to Jean. Then the ceremony at the church moved her. The panoply of war mingling with hymns and words of peace, the tumult of battle set over against the sacerdotal acts of the priest, and the prayers for the eternal rest of the soul that had known to the uttermost the

horror of earthly chaos, combined in some way to deaden the pain of mind, senses, and heart.

The funeral train would climb the narrow, serpentine road which led to the old town on the hill. Wounded comrades, hobbling along, their feet ill defended from the rough ground by straw slippers, some of them lacking an arm and others an eye, would follow the hearse of the poor, covered with the tricolor, behind the old parents or the young widow in tears; then would come delegates from the municipality and the hospital, then kindly disposed followers, pious people, idlers. The hedges would be growing green; the farms, with flocks of children at the doors and lowing cattle, would be awaking from the sleep of the long winter; one could hear the click of the milk-pail as it was set down upon the ground, the apple-trees in the fields were great tufts of unsullied flowers. When the procession, having climbed the hillside, turned toward the right the town came into view, its hotels and casinos transformed into hospitals with the

floating red cross, its church-towers, its long white beach, the boundless sea with its line of English transports, untiringly through all the months, bringing from afar British troops to the land of France. The whole picture melted away into the national flag that covered the body of the little soldier, shot through by a ball on the plains of Picardy. In all this there was a new and incomparable poetry; the self-sacrifice of a man to something that he hardly understands, a notable act in which all desired to participate; and by contract the everlasting unconcern, the utter indifference, of nature.

Every one, without exception, was thinking of the end of the war. It was an illusion wrought by the spring, the renaissance of all that lives, the urgent need of peace and happiness that all creatures and plants cry out for beneath the returning sun. Those behind the hearse shook their heads, saying: "What a calamity!" But all were thinking: "It will surely soon be over." They sighed: "My God, grant that this may be the last to go!" Alas, it was only the first springtide of

the war! If a prophetic voice should have cried: "In the spring of next year, in the spring of another year, and still of another, this same ceremony will take place, the same hopes will be uttered, the same illusions cherished! For season shall follow upon season, year upon year, only the horror and unhappiness shall be changed, for they shall increase and time shall know them out of all proportions that are called reasonable"—assuredly these good people would have been crushed.

As they went down the hill they gathered flowers along the roadside. The soldiers stopped in the wine-shops where they were given cider, and all returned to their places at once moved, saddened, and enriched by hopes, as is always the case when a new victim has succumbed.

Spring passed, and summer, and autumn.

Odette never spoke of her husband's death, though she was always thinking of it. She had found neither officer nor soldier who had known him. The death of Lieutenant Jacquelin in the early days of the war was a

disappearance like so many others, in a chain of events that had no common measure. A man would fall, another man would take his place; nearly all the officers by profession were dead, and there were officers still.

"What is a man?" a common soldier asked her one day on the beach.

X

EARLY in the following spring, when the gardens that surrounded the villas of Surville were gay with flowering plums, and the countryside was again covered with those lovely trees of rosy snow that it is a pain to look at when men are killing one another, when the woods were venturing to confide to the brisk air their new-born foliage, Odette was obliged to make a visit to Paris.

During the journey, in company with convalescents and men on furlough, old men, and women in mourning, she was astonished to find herself so much attached to the hospital which she had entered almost

against her will, drawn by something which seemed not to belong to her real self.

"Most of the women that I have met there," she reflected, "are of an unlovely pettiness, and one would say that they strive to transform the most innocent act into a shameful offense, from a desire to believe that there are traitors, guilty persons everywhere, and by a strange inclination to find the presence of the devil in every corner! And yet their service is excellent." Cunning malice, destructive backbiting, scandal set on foot by inconsiderate comments on trivial acts, often meaningless and that might well have been left unnoticed, open jealousy, absurd vanity, the most insidious intrigues to work up to distinction; to sum up, utter triviality—all these composed a body of customs recognized, admitted, in no respect casting a blot upon respectability. Only one thing led up to the mark of infamy: anything which nearly or remotely might resemble love.

How surprising this had appeared in the eyes of a Parisian woman of twenty-seven,

who had lived in the world of society during the years between 1905 and 1914!

Odette mused upon that social circle, young, cheerful, given to sports, relatively kindly and prosperous, who before the war had surrounded her.

What had become of Simone de Prans, Rose Misson, Clotilde Avvogade, Germaine Le Gault, and M. de La Villaumer? She had received brief missives from them, postal-cards rather than letters. On her part, had Odette perhaps disconcerted her friends by the accounts she sent them; had she perhaps wearied them by her persistent grief? Simone and Rose still had their husbands, the former grievously wounded, the other still whole, running about in his car as usual; Avvogade was attached to Great Head-quarters. Can any one understand the sorrow from which he does not himself suffer?

On reaching Paris Odette was singularly impressed. When she had gone to Surville in 1914, to forget the war and think only of her dead, she had been surprised to find herself on the contrary all the nearer to the war.

The trains of wounded, life among the wounded, the almost sole society of men but recently escaped from death; all this was far different from her recluse life in the apartment of the Rue de Balzac, which had indeed recalled the memory of Jean, but had also recalled the memory of the time of peace. Monotony of occupation, the continual living-over of the same emotions, at last dulls the sensibilities. The war as it appeared to her after eighteen months of hospital experience was a state of things to which her organism and her thought had become moulded. The long daily weariness, the constantly renewed effort, dulled her senses and confused her perception of events.

Paris in March, 1916, seemed to her much more like war than Surville. The battle of Verdun was at its height, and all Paris was ringing with its echoes wherever one might be. Newspapers, conversations, the tramways, the metro, the taxi chauffeur who gave you change, the woman who sold you a magazine, servants, masters, the rich, the

poor, bank employees, even to the sellers of violets in the streets, all brought to mind the war and Verdun, yet mutely, less by outcries than by quiet words, less by words than by changed color, the graying of the hair or of the beard, faded eyes, new wrinkles, and a certain indefinable manner. The whole earth and everything that it bears, every creature moving upon it, were a single sensitiveness, raised to its most acute degree. Acts and gestures apparently most remote from the war, receptions, dinners, the crowd at the entrance of the moving-picture shows, of classical concerts, of the few remaining music-halls, only showed the necessity for certain temperaments to tear themselves away from the nightmare of Verdun. Every one was affected by it, and so much the more as they were forced to tell themselves: "There are those who are suffering infinitely more than we."

Odette, in her apartment, was once again overwhelmed by her personal sorrow. She had lived in Surville with her grief buried in the depths of her heart, for though every-

thing she saw reminded her of Jean she had no leisure to give herself to dwelling upon the past. In the Rue de Balzac all her sorrow came to meet her entire as on the first day. It seemed as if her stay at Surville had done nothing for her. When Simone de Prans came to welcome her, it seemed to Odette that her friend had just arrived with the terrible news, and she melted into tears. Her tears surprised Simone, who dared not reproach her with exaggerating her sorrow, but who yet brought herself to give her to understand that so long and so violent a grief was not fitting, that no one any longer wept like that. Odette, made docile by eighteen months of punctual obedience to orders, did not resist, made no objection. "No one any longer wept like that"; it was a custom, one of those sovereign customs, which a Parisian woman instinctively accepts. Simone had said: "You understand, there are too many!" Which signified, such misfortunes are too numerous; they are raining down on everybody. The human heart would not be equal to its task if it must be always sym-

pathizing; each woman in mourning would herself die of it, creating a new and superfluous pain. She spoke with the greatest ease of her Pierrot, one leg paralyzed, one arm five centimetres shorter than the other and with shattered nerves. He was at the Ministry of War, and was content. She told of a ceremony which she had accidentally witnessed that morning, passing the Madeleine on her way back from the Flower Market. "A fine marriage, you know; red carpet on the steps, a crowd to right and left. Just as I was passing the doors opened, and up above I saw the young couple."

"There are still men to marry?"

"Listen; she, who appeared to be pretty, a lovely girl, a brunette, tall, leaning, as if enamoured, on her husband's arm; he in uniform, his decorations flashing on his breast. Oh, the handsome fellow, not thirty years old! He held himself upright, splendid, not looking at his feet; two large eyes wide open and fixed, as if he were speaking to a superior. She seemed to be indicating the steps by a gentle pressure of the arm, that he

might not lose an inch of his fine height. Behind them one could hear the swellings of the great organ. There was an impulse to applaud, for he was evidently a hero, unmaimed and superb. Every one was glad in the happiness of his charming wife, though pitying her in the midst of admiration, for to-morrow her handsome officer must return to the firing-line, and the war is endless. Suddenly there was a movement in the crowd, murmurs, whisperings, faces turned pale; the handsome officer had just missed falling, my dear, notwithstanding the care of his young wife to hide his infirmity, for he was blind!"

"It's frightful, frightful," exclaimed Odette.

She had seen and nursed most grievously wounded soldiers; but unconsciously a sort of convention had been established in her mind by which nothing that she saw, or that happened in the hospital at Surville, should move her. This first result of the war which had faced her elsewhere than at Surville, and under another aspect, impressed her al-

most intolerably. On the other hand, Simone had become accustomed to the dramatic scenes which at times occur in Paris, where everything is perhaps all the more sad because the war drama is close at hand, aping normal life. This juxtaposition of the manners of a time of peace and these shadows of the pit which mingle with the life of every day, more like a prolonged dream than like reality, produce surprising effects upon reflective minds.

Simone de Prans, who for a time had taken up work in a model hospital, an American hospital, was no longer a nurse. That was no longer done.

"What about our good Rose?" asked Odette.

"Rose Misson has arranged her life. She has resolved not to yield to things; she has been too much teased about her old husband, always going about in his automobile. Neither Rose nor her husband is disturbed by that; he remains on his seat; she dresses, visits the shops as in former times and receives the few friends who are not indignant

because her husband has not lost two or three limbs. Between ourselves, I think she is a woman who is doing a great deal of good."

"Only she does not cry it upon the housetops?"

"No; they will be upbraided for it all their lives, she and her husband; he, free from all military obligation, for having 'ambushed' himself in his automobile, she for having retained her placid manner, her good humor."

"I thought that optimism was in fashion."

"Optimism, yes, but not naturalness. The approved sort of optimism consists in unendingly predicting victory, with the jaw of a tigress, and in determinedly transforming all bad news into a presage of success. But those who maintain a quiet confidence without talking about it, and make life around them more pleasant by their usual good temper, are suspected of indifference."

"And in all this, what about you, Simone?"

"Me? I have a husband deep in govern-

ment councils, haven't I? It is a power in these days. People leave me alone."

"And Germaine?" asked Odette.

Simone appeared somewhat embarrassed. People hardly dared to talk of Germaine Le Gault. Germaine Le Gault had lost her husband at about the same time with Odette, and almost under the same circumstances. Like Odette, Germaine adored her husband. Germaine had taken the loss even more deeply to heart than Odette; her life had even been in danger. Germaine, like Odette, still wore her deep widow's mourning. And Germaine was now in love; in love beyond the possibility of concealment, in love with a head physician in whose service she had worked. He was a married man and a father.

"La Villaumer insists," said Simone, "that in her case it is simply a lack of imagination, and that no one should blame her. He says, you understand, that she is unable to bring before herself, as you do, for example, a vision of her husband. If she had been capable of bearing about with her a persistent picture of him, she would have

been faithful, if it were only to a picture; but she has no imagination; it is necessary to her that her mind should rest upon an object. It is one explanation—probably a paradox."

At that moment they heard in the neighboring apartment the playing of an excellent pianist which had formerly lulled the reveries of Odette when she was waiting for Jean. That neighboring apartment, into which the Jacquelins had never set foot, was separated from theirs only by a thin partition and a door. The music had often fretted Jean, but when Odette was alone she had loved to hear it.

"Listen!" said Odette. "Oh, it is more than eighteen months since I have heard music!"

"That is so," said Simone; "in Paris one finds a little of everything that one used to love; it is that that hurts."

"What is she playing?" asked Simone after a moment.

It was a revery; two lovers who are seeking one another, groping in the darkness of a garden on a lovely summer night; you hear

their hesitating footsteps, you suspect their vexed and feverish gestures, their eager lips that call one another without imprudently pronouncing a name; though their footsteps creak upon the gravel and a fountain drops its slow pearls into the basin. Suddenly the music of a waltz attracts them separately to the lighted house, and they exchange kisses on the steps of the entrance, before being swallowed up in the intoxicating motion.

"Oh!" exclaimed Odette, thrilled, "do you remember, do you remember?"

"What?" asked Simone.

"Why, everything! Everything that happened *before*, before this end of the world that never ends!"

Odette, overcome by the harmonious reminder of the waltz of a possible festival, of the joy of living, of being pretty, young, beloved, could only repeat:

"I haven't heard . . . anything . . . for more than eighteen months, Simone! Do you remember that evening at Mme. Sormellier's, at Bellevue, where both our husbands were so beautiful?"

"And we, too, Odette! We shall be old after the war. We shall have had hardly five or six years of youth. I will confess to you that sometimes I juggle with fate. I go to see Clotilde, who refuses to permit herself to be touched by events. She says: 'I can do nothing about it; I am good for nothing. Let the world let me alone as I let it alone! Till my last hour I will stay with my flowers, my books, and my music.'"

"Ah! Clotilde, yes; do you know, I had forgotten her!"

"Everybody is forgetting her, and she forgets everybody. Her husband is at Great Headquarters; he often comes. She is a privileged person, and she says: 'Why should I not accept all the good that is offered me?'"

"Yes," said Odette, "it is tempting, but I could not do it.—No, I could not.—See, I tried to shut myself up with my grief. Well, I could not. It is too great—this universal sorrow—too absorbing. Listen!"

The pianist next door, still devoted to her Chopin, which she performed in a re-

markable manner, was beginning the First Nocturne, the one that contains that phrase of lamentation, heartrending in its sober scheme and its sustained phrasing, without outcry or burst of passion, leaving the soul to the lasting sense of human woe.

"Oh, listen—listen!"

The pianist was accompanying herself with her grave, finely cadenced voice, following without words the sinuous course of the thrice-repeated utterance of sorrow. Odette began to sob; her nerves were unstrung by the apparent return to things of former days, while yet acutely conscious of the dreadful present.

"I must give up this apartment, after all," she said between her sobs.

"Yes, you will have to," replied Simone; "you would be overwhelmed with your sense of loss."

"For that matter I must give up everything."

"Everything? What more, do tell me!"

"Myself! See, I cannot delude myself longer."

"My poor Odette! You are hardly four days out of your hospital, and you go to pieces! We are only kept up by the presence of those who have suffered a thousand times more than we. You can't imagine what it is for me that my Pierrot has miraculously escaped death, with his body half destroyed. It is he who saves me from unhappiness. Those who have looked death in the face and yet have returned to life find it beautiful, whatever it is, and their wonder at it spreads to all around them."

"Yes, yes. I have felt that. If I had my poor Jean, even all broken to pieces, I should think only of the joy of having him safe. But I have him no longer, and the past draws me, at times, as if some one much stronger than I were taking me by the arms and drawing me backward with irresistible power. Do you remember Isadora dancing among her children and throwing flowers in one of the motives of the ballet of "Armida"? And that great fool Antoine Laloire behind us, crying: 'When one has seen that one may well say, "Thank you," to God

and close one's eyes forever!' He had no idea how well he was speaking. They say he had a splendid death."

"Yes. All our admiration must from this time forward be given to the beauty of our warriors. Harmonious forms, enchantment—we are done with them all, my poor child, done with them!"

"Done with them! So they say. So I thought, too, when I saw those men coming in by the hundreds, reduced to a mass of bleeding pulp; I still think so when I think of the long line of devastation which is spreading over Europe, of all those human beings who are every day dying around their torpedoed vessels; but think! The moment the art of our former days is able to realize itself anywhere, beyond a partition, it rises upon us like the sun that has been two days hidden. It will rise again, Simone! If only a few individuals are left who can hear a note, a shepherd will be found to invent the flute once again, by bringing reeds together."

"You say that because the art of which you are speaking only increases your sad-

ness. You are cultivating your sadness, and loving it still. If you were less melancholy, like me, you would consent to accept the new life just as it offers itself; but you will always see it irremediably disfigured, poisoned by an overwhelming horror. Life from henceforth is a Lady Macbeth with red and horrific hands, marking with a bloody spot everything that it touches. What fine art could flourish except by means of men not yet born, men who will not come into the world until after this horror is no longer spoken about?"

"Remember what those poor friends of ours used to say when they talked so well in our gatherings of former days: the flowers that bloom on graves are as fresh and the harvests that grow on battlefields are more abundant than those on fields that have never known crime and death; they are innocent, divinely innocent of all the past. The souls of artists are like flowers; and they purify the imaginations that have been soiled."

"And the conclusion is that you and I

both, my dear, have after all a good share of optimism, otherwise called a reserve strength upon which we can draw for a certain time. Let us hope it may be for a long time. And we find the same thing under the distress of nearly all men. Ah, how strong life is!"

XI

ODETTE began a round of visits.

For the most part they were visits of condolence. She went first to Mme. de Blauve, who had lately lost her young son, that charming boy of seventeen whom Odette had seen for a second in the Avenue d'Iena flying to the recruiting-office, to take the place of his father, who had been killed in the second month of the war. Mme. de Blauve had come back from Rheims, where at that time she had been a nurse, under unceasing bombardments; she had returned to her daughters, who were now growing up. Odette found the family no more crushed or morose than at the first time. The father,

Commandant de Blauve, adored by all, was dead; the elder son, in his nineteenth year, was dead.

"Happily," said Mme. de Blauve, "I have one left."

"How old is he?" asked Odette anxiously.

"He is about to enlist," said Mme. de Blauve simply. "Through him, I hope that our name will be represented to the end."

Every one knew that this last son was her Benjamin, petted more than all her other children. Her present anxiety was for her daughters; she would fain have married them at once.

"Marry them!" cried Odette; "but to whom, at such a time as this?"

"To good young soldiers, that they may soon have children."

Not the slightest emotion, though the family was truly affectionate; one single idea—to come to the defense of the country, by whatever means. Odette could not but admire, though at the same time she trembled.

"How far advanced is your mourning?" asked Mme. de Blauve almost severely.

"What?" asked Odette.

"I mean, how long is it since you lost you dear husband?"

"Just eighteen months," replied Odette.

"You are young," said Mme. de Blauve; "my child, you still have duties to perform."

"But," said Odette, bewildered, "I am doing what I can."

"We will speak again of it in a few months," said Mme. de Blauve. "I shall not lose sight of you. I count you among the *good* ones."

She dwelt upon the word "good" as she bade Odette good-by.

Odette did not in the least grasp Mme. de Blauve's meaning. Did she find her "good" because she had for a long time been conscientiously doing a nurse's duties, and did she think of sending her to some difficult post, requiring courage and constancy? She was cheerfully ready for anything. Only one thing troubled her; it was that the memory

of Jean seemed to be relegated to so distant a past, seemed to hold so small a place in the thoughts of the people whom she was about to see, she being still in deep mourning, and having been away only seventeen months, to mourn for Jean.

Why did Odette go directly from the Avenue d'Iena to see Clotilde? Not in the least by reason of the love of contrast, or the need for it, but because she was passing the Place of the United States, which attracted her with its trees adorned with their young leafage.

She found Clotilde as she had always found her, extended upon an ancient couch, amid twenty cushions, a dozen books and magazines, in an elegant room, with a bunch of carnations flaunting their glory, and hyacinths in pots surrounding the young woman with a fragrant suggestion of spring.

"Ah!" exclaimed Odette as she entered, without quite perceiving the significance of her exclamation.

Clotilde, perfumed and her tall figure

clothed in a Babani robe, kissed her joyfully.

"You haven't fallen off much, Odette. Tell me, are these your cheeks? No more rouge than in the old days? Oh, how often I think of your loss, my dear!"

She was the first person, except La Villaumer, who had spoken to her of her loss. Then there was still some one who remembered what had been her happiness, her extraordinary happiness.

"I haven't written to you, Odette, because I was too lazy, and because I need to imagine the face of the person to whom I write. So far away, under your nurse's cap, I couldn't tell—you are pretty; I love you always. Oh, how sorry I am for you!"

Odette, surprised, embarrassed, still under the influence of the life she had been leading, spoke as every one did:

"There are so many of us who deserve to be pitied."

"No, Odette, no; I am not saying that. No doubt there are many widows and many young women whose husbands or lovers are

maimed, disfigured, ruined. But there are not many who, before all that, have truly enjoyed life and love. You have known love. You have had a few years that are worth being regretted."

Tears rose to Odette's eyes. They were tears that gave no pain, which rather comforted her. It seemed that she had long been waiting to shed such tears. She had so constantly heard conventional words, forced expressions, the result of a strained situation which there was surely no reason to criticise; but, except from her wounded soldiers, she had not before heard words simply human.

Clotilde was not afraid to talk persistently of Jean, not because she felt that at bottom she was giving pleasure to her friend, but because her thoughts naturally turned to attractive things, and she loved to remember that charming couple of perfect lovers that Jean and Odette had been. Never having checked her instinct, it now told her that Odette, in spite of her tears, enjoyed the revival of these memories. It was not Jean the

soldier, Jean the hero, whose praises Clotilde sang. Odette had heard so many praises of heroes! She had handled so many with her own hands! There had never been but one Jean. He was Jean, just Jean, a fine, good, and handsome fellow who had nothing military, nothing surprising about him, except just that he was beloved. Who had dared to talk to her of that Jean since the war? No one. Clotilde was doing it in the unconsciousness of a woman who was still what she had been *before*. And Odette had felt some apprehension about seeing Clotilde again, just because she had feared that Clotilde had really not changed enough!

The interview was soothing, even delightful to her. Clotilde seemed almost to have forgotten the war—a little more and she would have made her forget it. She talked of the books that she was reading; books written earlier than the present time; she talked, too, laughingly of her clothes, on the pretext of the diminished resources of the family; she spoke of certain middle-aged and even old men, saying that they had

not been appreciated in the days when there had been plenty of young fellows. She offered her friend a cigarette; she smoked, and the two women looked at each other through curls of long, light clouds, as if in a dream.

Odette went out somewhat amazed at the incredible ivory tower which Clotilde had succeeded in building around her youth, her beauty, and her selfishness.

"Is Clotilde selfish?" she asked herself, as she turned from the Square of the United States. "And yet how she asked about my Jean! Clotilde is like every one else; she is interested in just one thing, has a passion for it. She has kept as by a miracle the one thing that she had before the war, and that is love. Everything that represents love captivates her; one feels that she gives herself up to it. The others yield to a different passion which, by the conditions of our time, takes on a more sympathetic form. Mme. de Blauve with sacred fury throws all her family into the jaws of Moloch; Mme. de Calouas, in Surville, has a passion only for the wounded, exclusively for wounded sol-

diers; I have seen her utterly insensible to an accident to a civilian; most of those women in the hospital had a passion for their duties there, thought themselves degraded when they had not the number of beds that satisfied their pride, lamented as if for a public misfortune when, by chance, fewer wounded soldiers came. There are even people whose passion it is to have no passions—and they are the most to be dreaded. Why should Clotilde deprive herself of her bouquet of carnations, her pot of hyacinths, her perfumed cigarettes, while they serve to create around her the illusion by which she lives, and of which, when the occasion comes, she gives her weary friends the benefit for a whole hour? Yet, could I do like her? No; decidedly not. Did not I, then, love love as she does? I do not know, I loved Jean. Then I am less simple than she; everything affects me. And everything is shaken. I am not flattering myself when I recognize that I am alive to more than one thing. I wanted to be wholly devoted to one—to my sorrow. I believe that I am alive only to my grief,

and yet sometimes I think that in this I am mistaken."

That day she felt an overwhelming lassitude. Clotilde had lapped her in "soft odors." As she was asking herself how she could finish the day she bethought her that she had been told that Mme. Leconque was another Clotilde, that is to say, a fairy capable of drawing one out of the war mood, though she belonged to a social set that was just now holding it as a great honor to give to it unstintingly both life and fortune.

"I must not fail of seeing her," said Odette to herself, "and just now I prefer another Clotilde to a second Mme. de Blauve, who makes me shudder." She took a taxi to the end of the Avenue du Bois.

Mme. Leconque was at home and alone. Muffled up in an ermine coverlet, in a room brightened by a wood-fire large enough to warm an assembly-room in the city hall, and surrounded by objects of art, ancient trinkets, Watteaux, Fragonards, she lay on a couch near a majestic bed, high and royal,

covered with Venetian point, determinedly knitting, amid yawns, little stockings of coarse wool, for refugee children.

"You, at least, have had enough of this butchery," she said.

Odette, under her mourning-veil, admitted that for her part she found no pleasure in it.

"I should be glad to know," went on Mme. Leconque, "what sort of a life they are giving us."

Odette looked around at the great wood-fire, the walls of the room, a perfect museum, and at the silky fleece that enwrapped the form of the dissatisfied woman.

"They have just telephoned me," Mme. Leconque went on, "that we have evacuated Malancourt. Just look at my stockings, if you call them stockings! I admit that I never paid seventy-five francs a pair for mine—I always sent to London for them and got them at thirty-five francs. And to-day I am wearing stockings at 3 francs 95!"

"Why do you?" asked Odette.

"You would despise me if I paid more for

them, in these days. You are in mourning, my poor dear; you don't think about these matters. Do you know where we are all getting our clothes? In the Rue d'Alesia, my child, in a store where they sell ribbons on the main floor for eight sous a metre, and up-stairs you find models of all the great Paris dressmakers at a third of the regular price. You might go there out of curiosity; I'll take you, if you like. You will find ten autos at the door, lined up before the tin-shop, the general shops, the house-painters, and the wine-shops. And where do you think we try on? Anywhere, no matter where. On the staircase, in the corridors, in the shop itself, three women together, not to speak of the old husbands and the men on leave, in a little parlor decorated with two opposite mirrors! Absolute promiscuity, a mob that reminds you of the old Neuilly fair; broken windows, no heat, and drafts of air that pierce through the lungs! My dear, I bought a charmeuse gown there for one hundred and seventy-five francs that would have cost seven hundred and fifty at Lanvin's! The

Duchess of Chateauruque goes there; the wife of the ambassador from X. goes, too. Can you imagine such a thing? Oh! we run against picturesque things during this war! Do you believe that life can go on this way?"

"I don't think so, indeed," said Odette.

"I see that you aren't pitying us. Well, for my part I tell you that I have had enough of this war, and that I despise it! Do you understand? I despise it. Ugh! ugh! and ugh!"

Odette returned home along the darkening streets, thinking of Mme. de Blauve, the terrible. She felt much indulgence for Mme. de Blauve, the terrible.

XII

ODETTE had bought a newspaper. During the night the Germans had made a series of massed attacks, debouching upon Malancourt from three directions at once. Our troops had evacuated the devastated village "while keeping its outlets."

Once again she tried to take refuge in her memories of love. But this evening the portraits of Jean that she saw around her did not speak to her of love. She felt that Jean, if he were there, would not talk of love that evening, but would turn away like an overwrought man to whom the beloved one insists upon saying: "Kiss me!" She could distinctly see the gesture which, however, she had seldom known. She could almost hear Jean saying: "My little love, I am anxious. . . . It is not that I lack confidence, but they are advancing step by step; it is disquieting, disquieting. You will think me cruel, but I should be glad to go back there. I would rather be there, do you see?" If he had been with her on permission he would have gone back! What torture! And she said to herself: "If he had not been killed the second month he would have been killed since then: twenty months without respite under the shells!"

Days passed; the German attack upon Verdun wrought upon the great public of France a great silence. No noise, not an ex-

clamation, no excesses in Paris; an imposing calm; a quiet crowd upon the boulevards, perfect order even on Sunday; almost gayety around the men who were home on leave who went about surrounded by young women in short skirts, Anamite caps or toques borrowed from the Palais, painfully walking on extravagantly high heels! Between four o'clock and seven every one was reading the newspaper. They were sold all through the city, not with loud shouts as if all Europe had been put to fire and sword, as when celebrated trials were going on; now that Europe actually was put to fire and sword, with less uproar than after the Auteuil races. In almost every heart the sublimity of the French struggle, the universal respect which it evoked throughout the world, overcame apprehension, stifled the sense of uncounted losses, and dominated that crater on the banks of the Meuse, in eruption over an extent of thirty-five kilometres, its lava overwhelming a whole countryside.

Odette was invited to dine with officers

who had returned from that hell, who were going back to it; and these men talked futilities like every one else: partly from kindliness, partly for their own pleasure, or in courteous resumption of the decorum of former days. Between two witticisms they would relate an episode such as no story of the age of fable could offer. Many of them were men who two years before had danced the tango, whom strait-laced old twaddlers had in those days held up to opprobrium. Thus Odette met again a young fellow of twenty-four, a captain, an officer of the Legion of Honor, lacking several fingers, wounded in the leg and the breast. He had the same simplicity, the same childlike grace, as in the old time at the Casino in Surville, and yet he had taken part in actions infinitely more grand than those of the Homeric heroes or of the wars of Cæsar or Alexander.

He kissed a lady's hand, and that same evening went back to the jaws of the volcano. And that same week the word came that after having been three times buried

alive in the undermined earth, his young body had been blown to atoms on Hill 304.

XIII

THE next morning, her friend La Villaumer having come to see her, she introduced a subject which had been tormenting her.

"The individuality of the soldier is not obliterated," said La Villaumer. "Either he expects to come through safe, believing himself to be a privileged person among the unlucky, or else he says to himself, 'I shall die, but it will be for something worth while,' and that even exalts his individuality. When that disappears or becomes attenuated it is by excess of suffering, of hoping against hope for the end of all that he is enduring—mud, cold, the incessant wooing of death, and ills without number, have annihilated in him all power of thought and feeling. And still it would be speaking too strongly to say that he goes deliberately to

meet death. Never has any living being failed to pay to death the honor of a particular deference."

"Do you think," asked Odette, "that one's individuality can be suddenly lost, or is it not rather unconsciously modified from day to day? You see, in the latter case no one can tell how far the metamorphosis may go! I see many people who have changed in the last eighteen months, and who seem not to be aware of it. I feel very clearly that I myself am different. I find only one part of myself unchanged; the part which binds me to the memory of my poor husband; nothing there is modified even in the very slightest degree—nothing; when I have leisure to think intently of him, I become again precisely the woman I used to be."

"Yes, but with grief in addition."

"That is true."

"It is that which modifies us. It broadens us when it finds a heart in us, and for that matter it exists only so far as it finds a heart. It holds within itself many possibilities.

Your grief began with embracing your personal calamity; that alone; and it still hugs it to itself, that is most natural; but it has unconsciously taken a further step, embracing the sorrows of others, a change which you never looked for. And that is making of you another person."

"Will every one like me find themselves a tone above or below what they used to be —as if the whole keyboard had been transposed?"

"I do not think so," said La Villaumer. "Nature changes little. Only sensitive souls are modified, and they are rare. It is they who at last, at the long last, act upon and change those around them. Characters change little, never fear! Yet this war will have been so intense that those at least who have had a part in it will retain something of it, like a strong leaven which will cause new things to germinate. We must expect new things; but we must not look to see the human race thrown off its centre. Historians, sociologists will have their work to do, while philosophers, moralists, the general run of

writers may go on as they have done. The word 'democracy,' for instance, will cover much paper——"

"Do you believe in such a thing, yourself?"

"I believe in the word as I believe in all words. It is a mistake to disdain the old-fashioned verbalism—rhetoric, eloquence. The majority of words are hollow—yes, but they are hollow like bells whose sonorousness may by itself shake the whole world. Those who use words are inspired by various things, and generally by sentiments that they cannot acknowledge; yet the word touches the finest chords in the soul of men whom one wants to win over. 'Democracy' has a tone——"

"Which will work good?—or evil?"

"Alas! The popular instinct and an inevitable necessity urge men, in spite of words, to enslave themselves, and they will of their own accord submit to the tyranny of new leaders, new groups representing interests of which the crowd will know nothing. Almost all my pessimism is founded on

the irresistible character of this law. Men must be commanded, and no one can be sure that those who command will not abuse their authority or the confidence which is freely granted to them. However, the official programme of democracy will be to devote all its effort to the well-being of poor humans who have not an average of fifty years to live in this world, who no longer believe in another world, and who in truth have some legitimate aspirations to live their few years for their own benefit, and with as little pain as possible."

"Poor men!"

"Yes, 'poor men!' That expresses the immense pity that will well up in every breast, throughout the entire universe. Fate will have demanded much of the human race. No doubt man has suffered through all time; but in a manner so prolonged and so scientifically cruel—no! At all events, never have men suffered in such great numbers; never have they been so acutely conscious of their sufferings. And then, in former times men who suffered had not been

learnedly informed that the world had come to the end of suffering. Those who are suffering now believed themselves to have reached the highest point of a period of progress in every direction. Never had man more firmly believed himself to be on the border of the Promised Land, than at the very moment when he stumbled into the infernal pit! What an aggravation of torment! Men may have been sacrificed for far-off ends which too often have not been attained; they may have been obliged, merely for their own preservation as living beings, to obliterate their own intelligence, and to become through long years—they themselves have said it—a sort of brute. Those who will survive will not ask the meaning of subtleties, or will not be in a condition to understand them. They will have only one thought: 'And now, what of me, me, me?'"

"A revival of individuality, then?"

"Yes, but of a fierce individuality, in which all that has for so long a time been stifled within them will urge them on to mistaken acts; or else of an exhausted in-

dividuality which will be the prey of exploiters never known before."

"Then you do not believe in a general betterment after this upheaval?"

"I only believe in more or less prolonged periods during which faith in betterment is possible."

"But, after all, man has goodness within him! He carries an ideal in his breast!"

"That is to say that he carries within himself—nowhere but in himself—that small portion of happiness which he may ever hope to attain. In fact, I hold him to be truly happy only as he exercises goodness, or as he aspires to what he deems the best. Man, the child, the savage, very clearly recognizes justice, much less clearly the beautiful; but the idea of the beautiful, however imperfect it may be in him, moves and may make him better. If he permits himself to slide down those inclines which deviate from these ideas, he may experience a dizzy joy of a bad kind. He may work himself up to enjoy strange pleasures, but seldom without at the same time perceiving that he is duping him-

self, and that pure and deep joy is not in these things. Yes, it is in himself that man finds his sole source of felicity, as the glow-worm his light. It may be that justice is entirely inapplicable and the beautiful wholly conventional, but what we may be sure of is that the inclination toward the just and the beautiful is most fruitful in happy results, though they will perhaps never find absolute realization."

"That is all very well; but in fact you believe neither in beauty nor in justice!"

"I believe in the passionate endeavor of man toward beauty and justice."

"Which he will never attain?"

La Villaumer suddenly changed his tone, and gazing smilingly upon the young woman said:

"That would be paradise, my dear friend; be reasonable!"

XIV

IT was the last hour of an April afternoon; budding foliage on the trees, the Arc de Triomphe, upon which every saunterer who looks to-day, looks with the vision of the triumphal procession to come, and the Champs-Elysées, unequalled promenade, which Odette and La Villaumer had so often seen crowded and joyful, in the days when the world was happy.

"Do you remember? Oh, you were a little girl, loving to hang around Guignol and trail after the goat-carts. But I was then no longer very young. Do you remember the time when there were no automobiles, and when the victorias used to go slowly down the street bearing beautifully dressed women whom one had time to admire, to criticise, to recognize, and salute? The auto is perfect, but the best it can do is to rush from one place to another, and that has by no means the interest of the daily procession, when it seemed that every one still had

time to live. Excuse my capricious imagination, but it seems to me that these machines were made just to bring us with all the more haste to the frightful time in which we are living. I dare say this to you because I know that you are not going to remind me that autos are rendering admirable service to the war, especially at this very time. You think, like me, that they also render service to our enemies, and that all these rapid means of reaching the battlefield coincide with a war without a conceivable end. In a general way, scientific inventions—don't confuse them with the sciences, which merit all veneration—conspire to give to this war a character of atrocity to which no armed conflict has ever attained, and I wish that it could be proved to me that they alleviate it in equal proportion. Think only of the horror which this 'progress' in the art of extermination inspires. How many brains are unable to resist it? Civilians are dying every day, and the best of them, who go to pieces merely from imagining the war. We see them fall like the hollow bark which still

seems to support a tree. You yourself did not know in your childhood the amazement that Jules Verne's 'Nautilus' caused. But you witnessed the crazy conduct of your contemporaries the first time they saw an airship sailing about in the air. It was pretty, to be sure, and the audacity of the early pilots roused us all to enthusiasm. Recall to mind the saying that was current on the greensward at Deauville when twelve airplanes arrived from Havre, three hundred metres above the earth, all rosy in the sunset rays. 'The flying Peace,' some one said. I shrugged my shoulders sorrowfully, because I know that in the face of an astounding invention one must always think of the homicidal use to which man may put it. Man has once again stolen the fire of heaven; a new Zeus will punish him for it. Humanity will blindly and with ecstasy invent the instrument of its own destruction. By means of an admirable scientific instrument it will commit wholesale suicide with a beatific smile. Man has already abdicated in favor of a machine. The war that is being waged is

a war no longer of men but of material. Man is belittled; the machine surpasses him! A rudimentary intelligence suffices to set the true force in motion. We are still believers in the ancient saying that the true force is manly virtue, the fine, old-fashioned bravery. We have belittled the only thing in the world which might be wholly great—man. Do we profess to worship that bravery of man which all the past has justified? Why, by the scientific character of war it has become—one dares permit himself the blasphemy—almost a sign of inferiority. We reckon upon the mystical value of our bravery, and we send our men by the thousands against an army of tools! By virtue of our century-old prejudices we honor only the man who exposes himself, sacrifices himself, furnishes, however uselessly, his proofs of courage, when the glory of our arms will belong to him who shall most securely have sheltered his divisions behind gigantic steam-hammers! The applied sciences have caused a moral revolution. By riveting man, who is before all else a soul, to material elements,

they have destroyed whatever might be justifiable in the great contests of humanity. A paltry little engineer behind his disguised heavy cannon, or with his mitrailleuse under thirty metres of cement, counts for more than our superb heroes with their courage, their loyalty, and their white gloves. Man, chained like a galley-slave to a machine, to a chemical substance, is forced to unlearn what it is to be a man. He appears very intelligent when he is equipped with algebra and terminology; yes, we must grant to matter all that it can give, but pause a little: have you not an impression that something superior is lacking in so abnormal a compound? They have domesticated the forces of nature; they believe themselves Titans; and there they stand glowering at one another like beasts; they cannot distinguish themselves from these material fabrics that surprise and overwhelm them. They call themselves masters of matter, and matter is all the time jeering at them. Engineering genius is probably not the result of a knowledge of matter, but of a knowledge of man."

XV

AT that period people were still dulling their senses with words and stupefying their minds with discussions, if so they might divert them from that one place which for the time being was as the pivot of the world, upon which they had for six months felt that all depended, as two years before all had for ten days depended upon the battle of the Marne.

La Villaumer went to his club; his lip curled with an almost wicked smile at the thought of the ridiculously false news which that evening, as every other, he was about to hear. Then he reflected that the charming Odette, whom he had just quitted, was very young, and asked himself whom she might marry.

Odette, still carried away with the life at Surville, sick at heart with those friends of hers who were doing nothing but dying of *ennui* and so demoralizing those around them, found comfort in frequenting such hives of

activity as the Franco-Belgian headquarters and its numerous annexes, all congregated in the same building on the Champs-Elysées, where it seemed that all the misery of the world was perpetually going up and down its staircases, without respite and without end. She would go there as if in answer to a summons. So many, so many unfortunates who had lost their dearest possessions, their house, their village church! Meeting them on the muddy steps, she seemed to see, reflected in their startled eyes, a bit of countryside, a poplar-bordered road, a bit of garden, a hillside, fields of beets or of wheat. She had travelled, she knew all those sights which are the natural companions of the life of men. The odor of the hamlets came back to her, the warm breath of stables, the noisome scent of stagnant pools, the sharp smell of the tanneries in the north, the balsamic fragrance of cedar smoke from the bakeries, the appetizing aroma of warm bread, so little known in Paris. Then she would picture to herself the bewilderment of all these folk who had found refuge in a

great, strange city to which they were not born, of these families who would never, never again see anything but the ruins of their villages, their countryside made unrecognizable by the absence of every elm, every bit of woods! She could have embraced them as they passed her; she longed to give them everything she possessed, things which, alas! could not replace what they had lost!

She thought to herself: "What have they done? Of what are these people guilty? Why are these men tortured? Why were they captured and their poor homes and little fields destroyed, and the sons of their blood, who alone gave a moral meaning to their lives? Why were not these people masters of themselves? Why were they the prey of bandits who consider even their own people as puppets, created to serve their vainglory as soldiers, and who care less for the existence of thousands of living creatures than a child for his tin soldiers?" Her heart throbbed, her soul revolted. She reached the top of the stairs.

To this building she had come without invitation to see an American woman who was freely and calmly consecrating her fortune, her intelligence, and her time to the unfortunates of the war. She came to ask if there was not something that she could do. The American woman looked at her with a smile.

"You have something better to do for your country."

"What?" asked Odette.

"Oh, we will speak of that later."

This answer had already been made to her. It had been said to her even at Surville, in the hospital, and with a mysterious air.

She was disturbed by it, and spoke of it, on a venture, to Simone de Prans, whom she saw that evening.

Simone and her husband both smiled as the American lady had done.

"What do you all mean?"

"Don't be disturbed," said Pierre de Prans seriously; "take care of yourself. A woman like you has services to give."

"Well, I must do something," said Odette,

trembling under her veil, "and as it is, I am doing absolutely nothing with my ten fingers!"

XVI

"WHENEVER the cloud of anguish rises even a little from the sky of Paris," said La Villaumer, "this city, so marvellously alive, clasps to itself life, of whatever kind, with a simple, natural impulse, without immoderation, but with a secret smile, always ready. Yet this power of life, on the whole so beautiful, has something that brings a frown to the brow of the onlooker; for it has within it insensibility and forgetfulness.

"How disconcerting it is to see this new, mutilated humanity, pass in the streets almost without attracting attention. Young men in uniform, or returned to civil life minus a leg, on crutches, with an artificial limb, leaning on a cane like an old man, with an empty coat sleeve, an eye gone, nothing left of the nose but two breathing-holes, the jaw moulded over like a lump of potter's

clay—or led along, sightless! They hardly arouse compassion, seldom even curiosity. There are so many of them! You can see the like in any place. War crosses, military medals, the Legion of Honor on the breast of a mere youth, which at one time would have attracted admiring glances and brought tears to women's eyes, are now hardly noticed. There are so many who have received or have deserved them! Most of those who possess them now wear only the ribbon on their jackets like civilians. The long duration and the barbarism of the war have spoiled everything. Men whose exploits cast into the shade the most famous examples of history with which the memory of school children is crammed, refuse to be called heroes. Heroes! There are so many of them! It was not to distinguish themselves, nor to cover their families with honor, nor even to set a noble example, that so many men have wrought prodigies; they did them modestly, because they had to be done in order to put an end to an abomination. With many the idea even of the country is attenuated in

favor of something which makes much less appeal to the heart, the motive of which is only the cold persuasion that militarism must be destroyed; one must fight for very hatred of fighting. And here is something new, this vast uprising for war is producing no enthusiasm for war; it is animated only by hatred of war. All these brave men, riddled like sieves, rescued from an ordeal without precedent, are cherishing no ambition to march in a procession of victors, under waving flags, amid the acclamations of women, children, and old men; they had the rudimentary purpose of the peasant who struggles with a mad dog, and who having downed him digs a hole, buries the carrion, washes his hands at the pump, and goes in to dinner.

"Germany has robbed man of his divine childhood. In less than two years all these men have grown old; that charming faculty of innocent enthusiasm which had often deceived him, but which had given him joys never to be replaced, has been withered. The most deplorable ruins which the monster has

spread abroad over our land are perhaps not so much the splendid monuments of Belgium and France, as the youth of humanity, that had seemed eternal, that was bearing it on to a great outburst of a common hope—faith in Fraternity, faith in Liberty, faith in Justice, potent religion of Progress. Cold reason, like the German gas, has poisoned all this fresh and ebullient vigor. The whole world has become allied, only to strangle a jackal. No man who has come back from the too severe ordeal will ever again feel the desire to enjoy the days that yet remain to him. Scepticism, which used to seem only a way of looking at things, cherished by very distinguished gentlemen, has now taken possession of the mass. But it has become commonplace, and so has ceased all relations with its brother, dilettantism. You will see what sort of thing realistic scepticism will become."

"People will always dream," said Odette.

XVII

ODETTE returned to Surville in the beginning of August. It was a time of great heat. The second anniversary of mobilization had been observed. War had become an accepted condition. Many already found it difficult to remember a state of peace. At the hospital there were even discussions as to how things had been there before the war. There were those who, though they had then been living in Surville, could not recall them to mind. "You remember the inaugural address of the head doctor, the 16th of August, before the first train of wounded came?" Some of the women insisted that he had given an antimilitarist lecture; others that he had spoken only against alcohol; others that he had given an eloquently patriotic address; some said that it was not he who had spoken, but the surgeon, a very handsome man; and still others that the address was given on another date. One lady could only remember the first time she had posed to the

photographer in white blouse and cap. The first arrival of wounded, who had come from Charleroi on August 25, were confused with those who had come in September. Two years! What a long time when one has seen only wretchedness upon wretchedness! Nothing pleasant for twenty-four months! The communiqué of the battle of the Marne? Yes, that counted for something; but at the time no one understood its full importance; there had been no public rejoicing. Our later long and magnificent victories that merely held back the enemy presented to the mind nothing like what is generally thought of as military success; it was only after a while that their importance was recognized, when new misfortunes had touched us elsewhere. Two years of dull, black weariness, of constant apprehension, of bereavement upon bereavement.

This year a good many foreigners had invaded the beach. The tennis-courts were occupied by young men from beyond the sea, bringing up the memory of former days; the crowd was enlivened by a profusion of multi-

colored Japanese lanterns; the sea dashed against the glossy flesh of women who seemed as natural as Aphrodite; automobiles were almost as much in the way as in happier days; and between the rows of tents among the manifold tints of colored stuffs, beside the waves where so many beautiful limbs were disporting themselves, was a race of beings that might have been deemed peculiar, coming, going, or remaining motionless; they were the men who had escaped from the fire. They wore nondescript garments, they lacked one limb or even two, they hobbled, their armpits strained by crutches, or lay at length on the warm sand, smoking, timid of appearance, exchanging remarks hardly comprehensible, keeping silent, too, thinking—of what?

This last spectacle alone seemed in Odette's eyes to merit consideration. She had lived the greater part of the time among the wounded, she had also lived in Paris with the social world. "All is over," she would say to herself; "nothing will heal all this; it is mere mummery to ape the life of other days;

all that is blotted out; La Villaumer was right when he said: 'Men have suffered too much.'"

It was in this very place—there, opposite, at the hotel—that she had become acquainted with Jean. They were pleased with one another at the first glance, carried out of themselves, even. She remembered how mad with love she had been in those garden walks, between those tennis-screens, on that beach, and along that terrace which now she was treading overwhelmed with despair, a despair that she could not name, greater than herself, greater than the broad horizon of the sea, greater than all things.

She had forgotten nothing. She recalled all the preludes of marriage, then those first vacations, their dual solitude in the midst of the throng; kisses exchanged on these dunes, along these roadsides, in some charming farm orchard, or on certain evenings before the fairylike spectacle of the phosphorescent sea; she remembered that room in the Hôtel de Normandie where he had left her a few days before the 2d of August! And she re-

called to mind the beautiful sky of that day, and the tocsin pealing from all the church-towers of the countryside, and the rolling of the drum, and the young men raising their hats. How many of them were alive to-day?

XVIII

SHE had hardly finished luncheon when she heard the jingling of the little bell at the wooden gate of her garden. Mme. de Calouas came in.

Mme. de Calouas found Odette surrounded by photographs of Jean. They were on the walls, the chimneypiece, the tables, the desk, the piano. Odette had taken the opportunity of her journey to carry to the photographer every film that she possessed; she had had them enlarged, and she was surrounded by Jean as if Jean had become a whole people; she saw him in every room of her cottage and in all places; she felt somewhat tranquil only when she could see him. If she seldom or never spoke of him elsewhere, as soon as she returned home she be-

longed only to him. She talked to him, consulted him, and heard the replies which, in accordance with his character, he would have made her to-day, if he had lived, if he had known what was taking place.

Mme. de Calouas looked about her at all these likenesses.

Mme. de Calouas was not among the number of hospital nurses who had been rewarded by the epidemic medal, although she had not absented herself for forty-eight hours since the outbreak of the war, and though her position in the hospital was a most important one; but neglect of this sort was either indifferent to her or it flattered her pride. She belonged to a family of which every member professed absolute indifference to rewards, especially to any that might come from the public powers, and this although it was the tradition of the family to addict themselves constantly to the highest duties. The magistrates among them had retired some thirty-five years previously; the officers remained fixed in the rank of captain. In the Morbihan the expression "the

Captains de Calouas" had become a common locution. At the outbreak of the war "the Captains de Calouas" had shown themselves to be men of the old-fashioned kind who considered that the finest part one can play in the face of the enemy is to be killed by him. Their unanimous and hardy bravery had, indeed, crowned nearly every one of them with the halo of sacrifice. Those with whom death would have absolutely nothing to do had this time risen in rank, and had received the cross after a succession of actions and for exceptional valor even amidst so many astonishing deeds. Of seven of them, only one was left, recently named lieutenant-colonel, with an artificial arm and a damaged lung.

Mme. de Calouas excused herself for coming so early, but said that she had felt an irresistible desire to talk freely with a friend in whom she had discerned "a choice soul."

"In the sort of convent in which we lived so long side by side," she said, "I consider myself somewhat as a mother to you, if you will permit me to say so, seeing that I had

the responsibility of opening its door to you. Will you let me talk to you as a mother?"

"I have great need of it," said Odette; "I have no mother, and I am a widow——"

She pointed around to the photographs of the dead. It was as if she were in a cemetery, herself living in one of its vaults. Her eyes filled with sudden tears.

"I love him as on the day he died; as on that other day, that dreadful day when he left me—I cannot cry all this upon the housetops. You, madame, have suffered like me, more even than me, the pain of this horrible war; we can no longer speak of our dead! We have no right to show our grief! There are too many griefs, too many dead. I have never been able to talk about him; I have found only one person who would consent to recall him with kindliness, and she is a Parisian, a self-centred woman who has managed not to permit herself to be touched by the war, a young woman, like me, but already a woman of former days. Who is there, henceforth, who can dwell on her personal sorrow?"

"It remains to be seen, my poor dear," said Mme. de Calouas, "whether what you say is an evil. I mean an evil for the time in which we live, during this war which has no end, and during the many years after this war; in a word, during all our lives—even yours. You know, my child, that I am a woman bound to all the old customs. In our family widowhood is a serious thing, and usually a thing for life. But this war has modified even our most firmly established customs. Great necessities, painful new duties, lie before us. We have been obliged to put down, with a strong hand, many of our feelings; we are bound to subordinate our personality and its most sacred traditions to the common weal. To mourn a beloved husband—what is more touching and more worthy in a young woman? But, my little friend, let me confide to you a cruel truth, of which you are already beginning to be aware. You were just saying to me that we can no longer talk about our dead husbands, however gloriously they may have been killed; it is equally the case of both of

us. Well, forgive me for what I am going to say—it is one of the most cruel features of this time that has no name—to mourn our husbands is a sort of self-indulgence, it is a personal civility, it is almost a delight! I shall startle you, but I must say it to you, I who am twenty years older than you, because I recognize in you a noble heart, broadened rather than belittled by this storm. My poor child, you have no right to remain surrounded by these likenesses of the dead. If we belonged to ourselves, we would give ourselves up to what our hearts would prefer—weak, human creatures that we are! We would choose to remember and to mourn. But we are no longer our own! Let us imitate our husbands! They would certainly have preferred to live. To assert the contrary is mere boasting. But without hesitating they accepted death. They understood, every one of them, that they were not their own. Nor are we our own. I give you my word of honor—and you can never imagine the object of reverence or the cause of joy that for twenty years my husband was

to me—if I were still young enough to have children I would marry again to-morrow! I am too old, and this is why you see me take so much pains in other directions. What the country asks of you is not work like what I am doing——"

"I prefer that work," said Odette.

"You are not your own."

"What the world asks of me is worse than death."

"Our husbands endured the sufferings of hell, and died only afterward——"

Odette burst into sobs.

"My child, my dear little friend," said Mme. de Calouas, "I beg you not to give way to despondency of any sort. Believe what I say, and do not think me hard, as I may appear to be. I am not hard. I have simply covered myself with a shell, because we are engaged in a merciless conflict. Let us not permit ourselves to be weakened whether by catastrophe or painful loss or bitter trial. To give way to grief is to grow less strong. For the time, we can be sure only of suffering. Each grief should give us the

opportunity not to weep, but to do more than before. There is only one aim. How that simplifies things! We look toward it, and toward it alone. We direct our eyes neither to the right nor the left. Anything may happen: we are ready, we will not fail. We may be asked for more than is in reason, but we have offered our services. No hesitation, no boasting; above all, no consideration of ourselves; let us leave all that to women of petty minds, since it is the only motive that can move them. We who know better must set them an example."

XIX

ODETTE went to her room to bathe her eyes, but it was all in vain; she began again to weep; she had an invincible desire for tears; she wept until the hour for going to the hospital.

She had photographs of Jean in her bedroom as in her drawing-room. And now it seemed to her that to give way to her grief was, indeed, "a delight"! She was in the

habit of giving herself up to sorrow; who would have believed that it was a way of giving herself up to pleasure? Yet in comparison with the excessive sadness of the present time, to wrap herself up, weeping, in the memory of happy days, was to set herself apart, to abstract herself in herself, to intoxicate herself with the fragrance of the incense on her own private altar, to divest herself of strength for the great common act which it had given her so much pain to accept, but the imperious command of which she could not now deny.

"It is still a pleasure," she repeated to herself. What chaos must have been wrought that her most acute sufferings, recalled to her by imagination, should take on the form of felicity!

Mme. de Calouas had affirmed that, for her part, had she fewer years, she would not hesitate to marry again!—Ah, no, that was too much! Anything, anything, but that! "'They endured the pains of hell, and did not die until afterward?' Yes, their martyrdom, their death, I would gladly accept for

myself; but I refuse to be false to my adored memories——"

Another burst of grief overwhelmed her in which her whole tortured personality resisted and asserted itself. She seized Jean's photographs and kissed them frantically. She would fain detest all the rest of the world and give herself wholly to this one sacred memory. For the moment she spurned the opinion of Mme. de Calouas: "If it is a self-indulgence, let it be so! I yield myself to this self-indulgence! I love Jean, I have never loved any one but Jean!"

In the old days she used to bicycle with Jean, and the two, side by side, often exchanging glances, sometimes throwing kisses, would roll breathlessly along the Norman roads, between the high, thick hedges where they were as if enclosed, with only one way out, where they had nothing to do but roll along. An auto would appear; Jean would go first, Odette following in his track, breathing his perfume until the cloud of dust and the smell of oil or of gasolene choked her. Sometimes, going slowly, they would take one an-

other by the hand. She was flexible, slight, and lightly clothed; she would play acrobatic tricks on her machine, and her joyful agility would fill Jean with delight. Suddenly he would jump down, she would follow his example, and they would exchange a kiss, folded lingeringly in one another's arms. There was a little wayside inn where, under the arbor, they would call for cider with bread and white cheese. They had never met any one there; the wind would ruffle the foliage around them, the dog would gaze at them with a twinkle in his eye, the hostess would serve them with a smile. More often than elsewhere they used to go to the orchard, the incomparable orchard of the farm at the foot of the ruins of Saint-Gingolph, where they were welcomed as friends, both so young, so beautiful, so radiant with happiness. There in the autumn they would walk in the little paths bordered with sorrel and thyme; where dahlias were growing beside onions, where there were currant-bushes loaded with rubies, in a corner a fig-tree whose fruit never ripened, under which they

must bend to go to the pear-trees. There Odette would bite into a pear as she passed it, and this would make Jean scold; he would gather the pear, nibble at the place which her teeth had damaged, and carry it to the good-natured farmer's wife, saying: "Just see what mischief we have done!"

"Oh!" the farmer's wife would simply reply, "Madame seems to enjoy it so!"

Delicious and terrible memories! Odette could not endure again to visit those places, so near, yet which would now have given her so much pain!

Nor could she again go in the evening, at nightfall, to the edge of the sea, where in each vague shadow she would have thought she saw the shadow of Jean. They used to love to wander there in the warm obscurity of August. The long-drawn moan of the sea was to them a cradle-song composed by a musician of genius. No doubt Odette used to see in those days fewer large waves than to-day; but in those days all things blended with her love and seemed marvellous to her. Sometimes Jean, who had his boyish ways,

would amuse himself by leaving her, suddenly disappearing from her eyes in the darkness. She would call him in an anxious voice, "Jean!" And she would always recognize his shadow as he drew near by his extending his arms in the form of a cross, and throwing them around her, to press her to him the moment he met her. In those days they would hear afar off the music of the violins, and would see above the dune the dark villas and the illuminated hotels. Now she knew that in those hotels were lying a thousand men swathed in bandages, poisoned by pus and gangrene, and the sea was holding up a long chaplet of buoys from which were hanging nets to ward off submarines. How could she go back there?

The summer wore away in a manner almost satisfactory, and with great hopes in the military operations. A wave of optimism passed over the country. Rumanian colors were floated from the town-hall; the battle of the Somme had freed Verdun and was itself beginning to slacken. In the beginning of October the wounded in the hospital were

almost few. Odette, with too little to do, reduced to solitude, began to droop. She found the conversation of Mme. de Calouas very fine, but it did not touch her. Why not?

She would have her lay aside her mourning—the two years being now a long month over past. Other widows had almost joyfully put off their crape in the late summer heat. Odette considered it a profanation. "Time was passing." No doubt it was. It was long—without measure long. But to her Jean had died yesterday, nothing in her feelings had been changed by what she had seen. She thought of all those bodily wounds which she had dressed with her own hands, and which had healed. The great wound within herself remained open. At times she would forget the war, the sorrows of which at other times would crush her, and think only of the beloved being to whom she was bound for eternity.

One afternoon she dragged herself, on foot and alone, along the road to Saint-Gingolph, between the brook, the fields, and the hillock that separates two valleys. The weather

was fine, underfoot were leaves of plane-trees, some decaying, others rolling along the ground, driven by the autumn wind. She had not the courage to go to the farm; the orchard came down to the roadside. She sat down upon the grass of the ditch and reflected that this was the third autumn that she had been there, since the war! She recalled to mind the first one, when people were beginning to find the hostilities very long; when every evening, passing by the post-office, one hoped to read the news of some event which would bring about its sudden end. She thought of the little soldiers whom she used to follow to the cemetery, and of whom every one insisted upon thinking: "He is the last one!"

Before her, on the crest of the hillock, like a fantastic screen whose edge has been clumsily cut by a child, a long avenue of very ancient elms broke in upon the view. They bore scattered clusters of foliage, still golden; a dense cloud of crows rose up and lighted with sinister croakings upon their ragged tops. These birds with their lugubri-

ous cries seemed about to give battle for the possession of a notable charnel-house. And suddenly they plunged into the branches and disappeared, and nothing remained of them but the wound inflicted by the rasping voices upon the motionless air. Then the black cloud uprose again, as if the avenue of old elms, mown down at the roots by shells, had upheaved itself before its final downfall. It seemed as if the heart of the hillock were painfully throbbing. The raucous croaking of these thousands of birds grated upon her nerves and aroused all her powers of mournful revery.

Odette resumed her walk back to the town. Evening was falling. Lush meadows along the brookside, a gray steeple almost hidden in foliage of rose ochre, the racecourse—relic of a brilliant worldliness—two or three pretty villas, whose reddening hop-vines were flaunting themselves derisively before closed windows, reminded her too painfully of a past era—a lost paradise. Among the persons whom she met, already half hidden in the shadow, some were laugh-

ing. Then people could laugh? Why, yes! Life, diverse as it is, has ever its source in the waters of a Fountain of Youth.

The darkness and the croakings of the crows haunted her. When she reached the cottage she threw herself upon a divan, and remained there, overcome, until Amelia came to call her to her solitary dinner.

The evening mail brought her tidings of the death of the last de Blauve boy, who had voluntarily gone to the firing-line in advance of those of his age, and had been killed outright in the very hour when he first set foot in the trench. Almost mechanically, and as a daily duty, she read two newspapers, line by line. She seemed to feel a great inward emptiness; she felt herself going to pieces. She must make a change, at whatever cost. There was just now no necessity for her presence in the hospital. She resolved to return to Paris, without other reason than the impossibility of remaining in Surville. How many feverish changes she had made, since the beginning of this war, with no more serious motive than this!

XX

ARRIVED in Paris, she went at once to see Mme. de Blauve. This woman, who had lost a much-loved husband and two sons hardly old enough to be soldiers, was not weeping, was not feeling dull, had no hard words to say about the war. She gave full evidence of tenderness toward her family, but, above all, she knew how to live, and that, in a time of war, means total forgetfulness of self and of all whom one loves. She was not sending her daughters into the hospitals, where they were not needed; she had herself given up her work as nurse, in order to give special attention to preparing them for marriage.

"Marriage is the civic duty of women," she said; "at sixteen and a half one can very well have a child. Marriage is a difficult matter in a time like this, but I am willing to pay the price!" She was thinking only of this, the oldest girl having passed her fifteenth year.

To Odette, Mme. de Blauve was another

Mme. de Calouas in Paris. She felt at ease with neither of them, and yet both of them attracted her inexplicably. She felt herself at a distance from them while yet being influenced by them, to a degree that surprised some indefinable part of herself. Both of them shocked her, wounded her, even; she was appalled before their stoicism. She looked at them darkly, almost malevolently, when they seemed to gaze with reprobation upon the mourning garments which she persisted in wearing. These women, brought up to worship the dead, uprose like spectres from the depths of the past which was their element, and uttered a word unfamiliar to their lips: "Forward!" The impression was most disturbing.

Not that she envied them, under the pretext that both appeared to have adjusted themselves to the sorrows of the time. Odette had no desire thus to adjust herself. On the contrary, she implored to be left alone, to bury herself in unending grief. And yet she felt a secret sympathy with these unavowed foes of the perpetuation of her love.

XXI

CROSSING the Champs-Elysées on her homeward way, Odette met two groups of blinded soldiers, each one led by a woman who helped him to pass from refuge to refuge. A blinded soldier invariably caused Odette to shudder with dismay. Of all the wounded by the war, such as he most painfully touched her sympathies. She stood on the first refuge as if petrified, gazing at these men led by the hand by young women, a third clinging to his comrade's coat, groping in the air with a timid arm.

In the face of distress like this, coachmen and chauffeurs, however much in haste, stopped short as before a funeral procession, which all Paris respects. The double stream of circulation was arrested in both directions recalling pictures of the waters of the Red Sea. The crowded foot-passengers formed a rampart with their bodies. No one saluted, for that is not the custom, but the seriousness of all faces spoke of the impulse, almost

the need, thus to act. Veneration, such as has never before been seen on French faces, was stamped upon the features of men and women, even of children. That which was taking place was almost nothing, simply a group of soldiers whose organs of sight had been destroyed, with charitable women serving them as guides. For two minutes they interrupted the movement of the Champs-Elysées. Yet it was a moral influence, an unrecognized, unclassified power, poor and even lamentable of aspect, which had suddenly arrested the prosperous physical movement of a great city. Odette felt her heart throb; her eyes were so blurred that as she reached the sidewalk she almost failed to recognize her friend La Villaumer, who was standing there, gazing at that simple, pathetic transit.

After the first greeting he said to Odette:

"I have often imagined Jesus returning among us; I thought just now that I saw him at the head of that group, motioning with his gentle hand to the crowd of busy mortals, 'Pause, travellers!' He had come

back as the God of justice and of love, just when the demon was making his most determined attack upon his beloved, just when each one of us is obliged to look into the inmost recesses of his heart and ask himself: 'What is going to be left?' And he was replying to us, 'Verily, I say unto you, henceforth cherish, all of you, a concern for human distress.' I thought, too, that I heard him whisper—pardon the blasphemy if it shocks you!—I heard him whisper softly: 'My sufferings have been surpassed; the sufferings of my martyrs have been surpassed.'"

"Oh!"

"Yes, they and he, while suffering, had the assurance of entering the Kingdom of God, and that within a relatively short time. The majority of these poor fellows are without that assurance; many of them are without hope, and their martyrdom has already lasted for twenty-eight months! They are about to endure a third winter, and some of them will last for a fourth! And who knows? From all this will be born into the world, my

friend, a 'religion of mankind.' It is not simply the human blood shed, it is the indefinitely prolonged torture of men, millions and millions of men, which will create a new mystic element upon which the religions of the future will draw. It is a dangerous vision; the salvation of humanity lies at the present time in nothing that in the least resembles humanitarianism.

"But I have something to tell you, my friend; Misson, the husband of our good Rose, whom we have so often ridiculed because he stuck to his automobile— Well, he has been killed, the good fellow, blown to pieces by the bursting of a shell, as he was driving some officers——"

"Oh, my dear Rose! I must hasten to her!"

"Do not go yet. It happened on the road to Rheims. She has obtained leave to go for his body— Do you know what Mme. Leconque said, when she learned that Misson's body had been blown to fragments by a bursting shell? She said: 'In his auto?— What a stupid death!' The death that one

receives in an automobile, you see, is not noble. It was, we now learn, the one-hundred-and-fourth time that a shell has fallen within less than thirty metres of his machine, and the ninth machine that has been struck in the course of his journeys. He will forever be unrecognized."

Odette could not refrain from wiping her eyes.

La Villaumer, who lost nothing of her actions, said to her:

"You are weeping for another sorrow than your own?"

"Is that what you think?" asked Odette; "it is still my sorrow; it is he who makes me more alive to the sorrows of others."

"Yes, but from the moment when you can thus weep for others your own grief becomes more tolerable."

"I would not wish to suffer less."

"You are not suffering less; there is room in your heart for a still greater sorrow."

"You always make me afraid when you say that."

"Odette, you must not be afraid of anything."

As they went up the avenue La Villaumer went on:

"I remember, last spring, regretting in your presence the marvellous aspect of the Champs-Elysées in the days of prosperity. And yet not one of those beautiful old days ever aroused in me so much feeling as the crossing over of those ten war-blinded soldiers. I do not cease to regret the time when these poor young fellows enjoyed the light; but I am asking myself by what mystery the greatest suffering uplifts us above the greatest pleasure. I even believe that the stimulus of the greatest pleasure is short-lived and degenerates rapidly, while the other lasts long and is endlessly purified."

"You are being converted, La Villaumer!"

"You know that there is no more convinced sceptic than I, and you know my predilection for the simple life, frank, wholesome, normally developing; one may say, happy in the pagan manner. But this mode of life does not exhaust life, though I believe it to conform most perfectly to the destiny of man. Life has acquired other dis-

positions, other tendencies. And this does not prevent asceticism, for instance, attractive as it is, from having at its base an incontestable psychological truth. In the present state of civilization we are not permitted to allow inconsistencies of which nevertheless the world is composed. If you so much as mention two contradictory propositions you are accused of instability, if not of dishonesty. Each of us remains shut up in his little, partial, incomplete truth; that is why the human race seems to one inconsequential and sometimes stupid."

"Come, explain yourself a little; how, for example, can one at the same time love pleasure and that which forbids it?"

"The problem does appear to be insoluble; but observe that there are none like the greatly self-indulgent to recognize the importance of an event which consists in renouncing all pleasure. It is those who most intensely enjoy the exquisite things of life who are thrilled to their inmost souls at the sight of a voluntary death. I have been present, as a relative, or as a mere onlooker,

at more than one taking of the veil. Think what the taking of the veil must be to a beautiful young girl! Well, fathers excepted, I have never seen tears in the eyes of men professing the same faith as the novice, but I have seen robust artists almost faint at the sight. They were wholly indifferent to the person who was thus leaving the world, but they adored beauty and love. They believed in nothing else than beauty and love, and they were the only ones in the company to be overwhelmed by the power of the motive that can tear a human being away from the attraction of such a magnet. These unbelievers, these intruders in the temple, experienced such a shock that they came nearer to fervent adherence to a God to them unknown than the men of tranquil faith, who looked upon the ceremony as something usual and in conformity with the order of things. Ardent converts are not recruited from among the friends of religion, but from among its declared enemies or those totally ignorant of it."

XXII

ODETTE must leave a card with a word of sympathy at the door of the bereaved Rose, and see her, stand by her, try, however vainly, to console her.

Fortunately Simone overpowered both Rose and Odette with her chatter. She was as well-informed, as in the time of peace, of everything that went on in private life. Mathilde Aviron—another Germaine Le Gault—was in love with a deputy.

"But," said Odette, "she lost her husband only four weeks after me."

"That is two years and two months ago, my dear!"

"That is true."

"It all depends on circumstances. They are going to be married, it appears.— And that poor Ogivier is slowly wasting away, in solitary misery, because his wife believes herself called to be heroic in the hospitals! Opinions differ; some say: 'She is doing right. What would you have? Ogivier is fifty-five years old; he is useless——'"

"But after all, he is her husband. Are her services indispensable in the hospitals?"

"No one is indispensable, every one says."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then, it is war. Some forget their duties, others don't know where they are. Mme. de Gaspari is absolutely bent upon making shells. She used to shed perfume at fifteen paces; she had her hair waved by X., and the beautiful hands that you remember— Some one has given her a chance in a factory! And how many things are happening that no one talks about! There are husbands who were in love with their wives, and who after the wives have been doing service in the hospitals, no longer feel the same toward them. It is not their fault! I know some who did not in the least object to it; but love is what it can be; many love in their wives only an illusion pleasing to themselves, such, for example, as that a wife should come physically near only to her husband. When their wives come back after having spent whole days—perhaps nights—in those hospital rooms—what would you

hear? Every one cannot get over a painful impression simply by the aid of reason."

"And what about the girls who do the same?"

"Yes, it is evident that men will have to accept new ideas."

"Say, that unlucky Gendron has had an attack."

"What, at his age?"

"Yes, he is still young; and he was so healthy! He was by no means a useless man. Here he is cut down; he cannot endure the idea of the war. War perhaps seems worse to him at a distance than if he were in the trenches. 'My head is splitting; it seems as if a petard had been fired into my ear. I would rather explode than watch for it.'"

"He is a singular man."

"He didn't 'explode' as he said. He is 'watching for it' with his mouth drawn to one side and an arm and a leg paralyzed—his intellect intact. People's lots are different. We see all sorts."

"There are unfortunate people; here and there are some who, whether they will or no,

find the war turning to their advantage; and then there are many who really do not know what they are going through; they are as if possessed."

"What do you think of La Villaumer?" asked Simone.

"I hope that you don't propose to have him exorcised," said Odette.

"No, but has he told you that he is trying to sell all his property, his collections, his books? He wants to realize on all that he owns, and give it for the war."

"He is very much touched by it."

"But, my dear friends, who is there who is not?"

"Mme. de Boulainvilliers has distributed her entire fortune among war works; she has mortgaged her house to enable her to support an auxiliary hospital which she has opened in it; she is already begging right and left. She will come to be a charge upon the public charities. All her sons have been killed; but her relatives are furious."

"Little do I care about relatives," said Odette; "she is doing a good thing, and all

the more because every one knows that she isn't in the least pretentious. 'There is no great merit in what I am doing,' the old lady says modestly. 'Why, I shall soon be seventy years old; if I do not take care of my wounded the state will have to do it, and that would impair the fortune of my relatives as well as of everybody else.' But she does not say everything that she thinks. What she thinks is much simpler than that; she enjoys, above all things, making little creams for her soldiers. 'But for my hospital,' she says, 'they wouldn't get any!'"

"Have you heard of Clotilde's adventure?" asked Simone.

"My goodness! has Clotilde too been touched by the war?"

"Oh, in the most unexpected way. You know that she vowed to keep the war away from her. Her husband is at General Headquarters; when she sees him she forbids him to speak about the war. But Avvogade had a friend of his childhood, a school comrade—a man whom one never met at their house in the old days—a modest employee in a

Trust Company, but a tall, well-made fellow. The poor fellow lost his sight as the result of trepanning. His condition produced a great effect upon Avvogade; Avvogade suddenly felt all the old friendship for his comrade revive; he goes to him as often as he can, takes him out to walk, brings him home to lunch. Clotilde dares not object, but she is simply aghast. The mutilated man's conversation does not interest her and the sight of him horrifies her. 'We don't talk about the war,' says her husband. 'I am not breaking our agreement.' They don't talk about the war, but this man with his closed eyes embodies the war to her, and thus the war has entered her house. And no one has anything to say to her but: 'You can't escape it, my dear.' If Clotilde was not such a dear every one would laugh, for, after all, her trouble is not a great one and there is something absurd in the adventure."

XXIII

As she went about among her friends Odette perceived that she was regarded in Paris as one of the women who during the war was sacrificing herself for the public good. One must have a "war" reputation at all costs. No one said a word as to her conduct as a widow, or as to her moral ideas. But because she had been absent and was known to have been for a long time a hospital nurse, every one ascribed to her that spirit of self-abnegation which gives reason to expect all things from certain exceptional persons, born for sublimities. The compliments that she received were not ironical. Her profound and unalterable grief for her husband's death, the very discretion which she observed in making no lamentation before her friends, were not lost upon them. Odette, sad and silent, enjoyed what might be called "a good press." The praises bestowed upon her simply transformed into extraordinary virtue what was only natural

to her. At first she found it stupid; then it disturbed her.

"But what am I, after all?" she would ask.

"You are an exquisite woman! Your conduct is admirable!"

And every one present would acquiesce. It was in a drawing-room which might have been supposed to be the seat of the War Committee, where were young women, women on the further verge of youth, poetesses, princesses; through which passed generals, convalescent heroes, ministers, men of all shades of politics, literary celebrities, and the sad relics of before-the-war æstheticism. The secrets of military operations were known there, whether carried out or simply planned, the underside of diplomacy, future declarations of war, historic nights, scandals unknown to the public. News was handed about, discredited, misconstrued, torn to pieces. An apparition from another world, like Odette, felt herself facing all Europe in arms, or some world-congress; rising from the mod-

est tomb in which she had been living she was dazzled, her head was turned with it all. She rose to return to her solitude.

On the staircase she met La Villaumer, his smile scornful at the thought of the foolishness which he was about to hear.

"What do they expect of me?" she asked. "Imagine, there are those up-stairs who were ready to swear that I, all by myself, directed the battle of the Somme!"

"Not at all," he replied. "It is simply that you are a very worthy woman; you honor the house."

"All very well! But they frighten me. They seem to be expecting something of me——"

"That you will do the house still greater honor! Receptions of this sort would fain be taken as pictures of the country, in the small."

"Tell me about yourself, La Villaumer; how much truth is there in what they tell me—that you are going to distribute all your property and live in a garret?"

"Oh, it is a naturally erroneous para-

phrase of an expression of which, like you, like many others, I have often made use. I have said: 'I no longer count. None of us any longer counts.' Which means: 'Whatever our value may formerly have been, the common cause is too grand for us to indulge in the fatuity of putting a value upon ourselves. Whoever we may be, we are reduced to nothingness by something superior to ourselves.' It is a rather stern assertion, and just because it is so it sets imaginations to work. Our amiable gossips immediately translate it into a child's picture, impressive by its crude coloring, in which they see me shivering on a pallet."

"And the story of Mme. de Boulainvilliers?"

"So they have told you the story of Mme. de Boulainvilliers as well? She is a truly generous woman, but not an imprudent one. She so well knows what a snare there is for her in the pleasure of coddling her hundred and twenty soldiers, that, having no direct heirs, she has put a part of her property into an annuity, in order to become a charge

upon no one as long as she may live. All the rest she gives away. She detests her relations and delights in frustrating them. No one would talk about her, perhaps, if it were not for the cream of the end of the story, a little detail which happens to be true, and which does good."

"Let us have done with our good women and our special cases. But you, yourself, what do you think, on the whole, of sacrifice?"

"The general opinion is that men are without exception ruled by base personal interests; but this view only takes into consideration the calm level of the human ocean; in reality it has its tempests, which are the passions, and man in a state of passion no longer thinks of his interests. In the depths of my soul I believe that sacrifice may very well cause the greatest happiness."

XXIV

SOME little time later Odette went to see Clotilde. It was early in a mortally cold winter; for two months already cold weather had raged, bitter and uninterrupted. The question of fuel was beginning to be serious; there were rumors of restrictions in many things. Paris was uneasy, though the newspapers, with their miracle-working ink, turned adversity into beauty.

Odette found Clotilde in her usual atmosphere, a happy accident having permitted her apartment to be warmed. She was surrounded by books and flowers, and wore a robe of some silken fabric which moulded itself to her sinuous form. She at once exclaimed:

"Do you notice anything changed here?"

"Not you, certainly!"

"I have had the rooms done over; how do you like this gray?"

"It's lovely! With the cherry color of the curtains it is really perfect."

"Ah! I was sure that you would think so! The others go through the rooms as if they were daft; they don't notice anything."

"You have a new photograph of your husband. It is wonderfully good."

"Doesn't he grow handsome? And yet the dear fellow is overworking. It isn't a sinecure, I assure you, his position at General Headquarters! But I feel sure that I amuse him; I divert him from his worries. Without flattering myself I please him, these days. And I love him, Oh, how I love him!"

"You are two lucky people."

"Forgive me, dear Odette, I am almost ashamed to dwell upon my happiness before you. But you are the only person who understands; you, who have truly loved."

"Who love still, Clotilde."

Clotilde opened her eyes wide, thinking that she had not heard aright. She knew what love was, surely, but it was difficult for her to admit that after two years and a half one could love a dead man, as she loved her strong and handsome husband. Yet she certainly could entertain no suspicion concern-

ing Odette, and she at once resolved to make the most of her friend's enduring sentiments to talk to her about her own personal love. She overwhelmed her with it as with a flood. Her love had reached an intensity which it had never known in times of peace. The seclusion which she had chosen in order to avoid hearing any talk of war had built around her an ivory tower; and no longer meeting any one but her husband, her pleasures ministered to only by him, she had found him taking a place of unusual importance in her life; in himself he embodied all the delights of which the war had deprived her, and which she had learned to forget.

Odette herself began to speak of love. The subject was painful to her, and yet she enjoyed it. Clotilde was the only creature with whom, since the war, she had been able to converse on the subject without diffidence. Letting herself go along the lines of her memories and her habitual reveries, she began to taste the joy of a prisoner shut up in a dark cell, who finds an opportunity to

mention the brook that flows through the sun-bathed field below his father's house.

"After all," she concluded, "the things that we have been saying, if they could be noted down, would interest the world more, fifty or a hundred years hence, than all the terrible events that are taking place."

Clotilde would hear nothing about "terrible events." Love alone was worth considering.

"We meet love everywhere," said Odette. "I find it springing up under my feet wherever I go; in the operating-room, at the bedside of the wounded and the dying. The towns nearest to the front are fuller of it than any others, it would seem. They say that it has never caused such a stir."

"It represents life, which must be perpetuated, whatever happens. In your case, my dear Odette, love is joined to death, but in general, no; it severs itself from death. Those of our day who sing of love and practise it are more surely serving the future than those who conceive of restraint as the sole virtue."

In spite of herself, these unpremeditated words brought a sudden light into the perplexed thoughts with which Odette's persistent sorrow and her natural disposition as a loving young woman inspired Clotilde. She felt impelled to cry out to her: "You think you are loving a dead man, my poor dear! but you are not twenty-eight years old; you are in love with love; it is always here, and is waiting for you!"

Both of them were equally incapable of disguising the truth as it appeared to them. Odette, bound by a tie whose almost inconceivable strength kept down every other sort of desire; Clotilde simply deep in love to the point of hardly being able to imagine a case different from her own. By chance she had not uttered words which deeply wound a bleeding heart, but Odette's acute senses at once perceived that there is hardly any conversation possible even upon the dearest subject that they may have in common, between two creatures, one of whom is happy and the other in sorrow.

She at least observed this: that Clotilde,

from an absolutely opposite point of view, was at one with Mme. de Blauve, with Mme. de Calouas, with La Villaumer, with each and every one, in saying to her: "My dear friend, you should not always mourn."

And her grief, so genuine, was increased tenfold.

But Clotilde, self-indulgent, egotistic, and thinking only of her own pleasure or of sparing herself pain, was saying to Odette:

"See here, my dear; will you do me a great service? Will you come to lunch with us tomorrow? Would that bore you?"

"Why should it bore me? Why do you call it doing you a service?"

"It is settled, then. See here; I must tell you a secret. You know how I love my husband, how happy I am. There is only one dark spot: my husband has a friend, a blinded officer—Captain Dessaud. He brings him two or three times a week to lunch, on the pretext that he is lonely, with no family, and desperate. Of course I cannot object, you understand; but the sight of that man is painful to me to a degree that you would

never believe. I have to talk to him, and I have nothing to say to a fellow who has lost his sight, who hopes for nothing, who has no motive for being happy. I am sick with it. Come to my help—you are used to wretchedness, you know!"

"Yes indeed, yes indeed, I will come."

XXV

ONCE at home, Odette thought more about Clotilde's conversation than about the coming meeting with the blinded man, which she dreaded. On the other side of the thin partition of her little drawing-room, her neighbor, the musician, who was sometimes reinforced by a 'cellist, was filling all space with enamoured, passionate, and agitating sounds, enough to rend the heart. Love, love, everywhere and always love! For the first time in her life Odette, who adored love, who but now had been delighting in talking freely of love, who even admitted the justice of some of Clotilde's assertions

on the superlatively beneficent office of love, Odette felt that in thinking of love and talking of love with her friend she had lost tone, and now she had only one thought, heard only the one voice from beyond the tomb. "When I am talking with my friend," she said to herself, "I seem to be taking part in what is said, or is laughed at; yes, but I take part in it like the dead to whom it is given to perceive earthly things once more. The war, when it robbed me of my Jean, crushed the vitality of my body. My heart has become forever insensible. I am carried along in the whirlwind of present events like the threshed straw which might float above the standing harvest, thinking to recognize in it stalks like itself, without realizing that the iron has cut it off, separated it forever from the earth."

The moaning of the violoncello, the influence of the music, gave a sort of lyric inclination to her usually modest thought and contributed to increase her agitation.

"The times are so hard," she continued, "that I have not had, for two years, the

slight consolation of talking with any one of my love-sorrow. I could hope to do so with one alone, because her love is, so to speak, apart from the war. But when she speaks to me of love I perceive that her idea of love is not mine, or is no longer mine. The love that I bear within me is no longer accessible to any human creature!"

The musician in the next room took up, as usual, her favorite *Nocturne*, accompanying it with her voice, wordlessly, until the grand, inspired utterance of desolation, thrice repeated, enwrapped the hearer like the long dark locks of night itself.

Then Odette, solitary amidst the pictures of her well-beloved, fell into a long fit of weeping, as she had so often done before.

XXVI

SHE found Clotilde alone next day at the lunch-hour, her husband being almost always late, especially when he had to go to fetch the blinded man. At last she recognized the voice of the handsome George in

the anteroom, and saw him pushing before him, as a ventriloquist guides his automaton, a tall young man, neither handsome nor plain, in the uniform of a captain of light infantry, and with closed eyes. The blinded man bowed, and clasped the hand that Clotilde laid within his own; George explained to him that one of their friends was with them, a young war-widow, Mme. Jacquelin. The blind man also pressed the hand that Odette extended to him.

He already knew the apartment with minute exactness. He walked to the table without aid, almost without feeling his way; and recognized each flower by its perfume; they directed his fingers to the primroses which have no perfume, and one would have said that his eager fingers recognized the table decorations as strange little mute personages. After a brief touch he knew the precise situation of each object; with the blade of his knife he recognized the nature of the food on his plate, and cut it adroitly. Possibly he might have been able to help himself, like others, from the dish presented by the

servant, but he was spared the necessity of this feat by the question: "What do you prefer, captain?"

He talked freely, almost gayly, though with an evident effort. He appeared to be intelligent without ever having been cultivated; but neither his person nor his mind revealed anything remarkable. He would doubtless have been a man like any other if he had not been blinded.

Odette shuddered on looking at those closed eyelids on the face of a man in whom one divined, notwithstanding his effort to conceal it, a secret suffering. Yet his voice was not that of a man who bore a mystery about with him; his suffering probably did not attain to those higher regions which a rich imagination transforms into torture-chambers for men unhappily deprived of the light of day; he did not dream of romantic sunsets, of the contemplation of the celestial vault, or of Correggio's sunlight, nor even of the beauty of houris.

As George was offering to his touch the cigars in a box, he whispered in his ear:

"You have been lunching with a pretty woman, old fellow, don't you know?"

"Your wife? I should think so!"

"My wife, yes, but the other one, young, very pretty!"

The blind man seemed to reflect, shook his head and said:

"That always gives pleasure."

"Her husband," George went on, "was killed in the early days——"

"Has she children?" asked the blinded man.

"They had only been married three or four years; they would have had——"

"Perhaps she loved him too much? That sometimes happens, it appears."

"Yes," said George.

The blinded man turned his closed eyes, like an extinguished lighthouse, in Odette's direction. He experienced a curious feeling, almost envy, of the dead man who had been so much beloved.

He became more interested in Odette. It appeared that she had nursed one of his comrades through a bad affair at Surville.

Men cut to pieces, gaping wounds, sensational operations, and the agonized resignation of those young men did not produce in her one-quarter of the pitying revolt which was caused her by the eternal privation from light which a living, healthy being might suffer by her side.

In his presence she recovered something of her manner of speaking with the wounded, but her natural frankness was not animated by that smiling perspective of a still possible future which a woman perceives at the bedside of a soldier, even one who has lost a limb. The nurse speaks no falsehood when she says: "My little friend, when you are well, when you once more see your home, your village—" But when she is constrained to omit from her vocabulary the radiant word *see*, how constrained and powerless she is!

Blinded men always awoke in her extreme compassion when she met them in the street, when they were spoken of in her presence. She remembered how tears had risen to her eyes, how her throat had contracted,

when Simone had described that wedding at the Madeleine, the handsome couple coming down the steps, the bridegroom all adorned with decorations, in the face of an admiring crowd who suddenly perceived that he could not see. But she had never before been obliged to carry on a conversation with one of those beings whom the deprivation of a sense makes more different from ourselves than the loss of many limbs. She instinctively managed it very well, though she was moved to the last degree; she knew at once how to speak to one who had been greatly afflicted—as she would have done to a normal man, without appearing to notice his condition. The captain was grateful to her for it, and it was evident that he was much more at ease with Odette, on this first meeting, than he had ever succeeded in being with Clotilde, whom he had known a long time. Clotilde, incapable of dominating her selfishness, could have been brought by no human power to the point of forcing herself to an act not agreeable to herself. Her husband, who was pained by

her attitude, said to her: "See how gracious Odette is!"

The blinded man went away with his friend, evidently happy for having chatted with a pretty and afflicted woman, for having been able to induce her to act as if neither she nor he had been touched by misfortune.

"Judge," said Clotilde when the two men had gone out, "to what point I am stupid and benumbed, and what a service you have rendered me! But I beg pardon for having inflicted it upon you."

"When a thing of this sort pains me," said Odette, "I do not know what I feel. I have noticed that at the hospital, especially in the early days. I don't deny that it seems as if I were being rubbed the wrong way, but there is a sort of miraculous cure that acts of itself, penetrating like a drop of balm, to the very depths of the wound."

"I don't understand you at all," said Clotilde; "a thing that bores me bores me, and when anything hurts me I simply must push it away or go away myself."

"I used to be like you," said Odette; "I am still, in all that concerns my grief. For that there is no balm; nothing will ever heal it. Perhaps there is something exceptional in love; it takes possession of us, it makes us happy to an extent that blinds us to everything besides, or it wounds us to death. But all that is not love, and what tries to embitter us must carry its antidote within itself."

"When we love," said Clotilde, "nothing else can seriously affect us."

"Notwithstanding which, I assure you that I have often within the past two years been painfully affected, and I have not ceased to love."

"You think so, my poor Odette! But if Jean had continued to be with you, you would have had no feeling but for him."

"Clotilde, you are spoiled by happiness; you understand nothing!"

Clotilde shook her head. She felt that she had somewhat nettled her friend in unveiling her thought to her.

"You will come again all the same, Odette? Even to face my blind man?"

"If you wish," said Odette sadly.

XXVII

CLOTILDE'S state of mind, which she had until now rather enjoyed, began to trouble Odette. She had thought herself entirely in harmony with Clotilde, just as Clotilde had imagined herself to think in unison with Odette, because both of them loved, and because until then nothing had seemed to come between them. But to-day Odette was repelled by Clotilde's attitude, her ivory tower, her aversion to suffering, and her lack of suavity. "I used to be like her," Odette said to herself. "Am I different now because events have taken me by storm? Or is it indeed, as she says, because Jean, whom I surely do not love less, is not here to engross me?"

She was terrorized by this idea, which nevertheless she felt to be false. She was overwhelmed with remorse and accused

herself of having grown cool in the worship of her husband. It was true that too many things were conspiring to lead her away from the thought which ought to be her only one. She returned once more to her mortuary chapel, her relics, her portraits. To guard against her sorrow being frittered away by the many sympathies with which her walks inspired her, she shut herself up at home. The winter, aggravated by the hostile cold, was so depressing, the news from without was so gloomy, that Odette fell into a sort of neurasthenia. She, who had never known illness, was constrained to call in a physician. He ordered, not medicine, but diversion at any cost.

"There are still many theatres open," he said; "I don't ask you to go to see 'gay pieces,' which are cruder than anything else, but go to something good. A woman of your years," he added, "has no right to let herself die of inanition."

She obeyed the doctor, not to save her health, but because she was touched with shame. Here was another who said to her:

"You have no right." It was a middle-aged physician of great celebrity, and even intelligent; he had lost his two sons in the war; his wife had died of grief, he himself was mobilized and was working hard in the hospitals.

She went once to a benefit performance. *Carmen* was given. She had adored that work whose obscure and brilliant genius had often benumbed her like a bunch of dark carnations with their pungent fragrance. But her attention was captured by the presence at her side of a sublieutenant whose sleeve hung empty by his side, and when the young man, all on fire, turned to his neighbor on the other side, who must have been his mother, or to some friends behind him, the soft, superfluous cloth, with its short gold braid brushed Odette's knee. The officer became aware of it and, excusing himself, gathered up the cloth with his right hand. More than this, from one of the boxes broke out, at almost regular and too frequent intervals, a man's laugh, abrupt, uncontrollable, and without the

least relation to the dramatic work that was being given. Several persons turned that way, indignant at first, even angry, until one of them perceived that this ill-timed gayety came from an officer who was listening with the utmost seriousness, but who was affected by the results of a cerebral shock. Word was whispered about, no head was again turned; every one was universally commiserating the infirmity whose tragic character equalled that of the masterpiece to which they were listening.

"'You must be diverted at any cost,'" thought Odette.

"In the matter of therapeutics," her friend La Villaumer said to her, not long after this experience, "for my part I believe in a very old rule, which says: 'For great evils great remedies.' In times like ours, for any one who has greatly suffered, diversions are less appropriate than strenuous tasks."

XXVIII

ODETTE went occasionally to lunch with Clotilde to help her entertain her blinded man. In general she went about fitfully, now here, now there, to offer her small services. She was welcomed at sales, for she pleased people.

She even inspired, at her booths, what people call passions—sudden and burning—which, however, manifested themselves indirectly and discreetly, so much did even the boldest man dread to approach a young widow universally known to be so proper, and so faithful to her grief.

The first was a commandant of infantry who had been wounded three or four times, and who had a long convalescent leave; he was barely thirty-four years old, and was one of the finest types of soldier in the present war. After having conversed with Odette he sent a friend to ask her if later, strictly speaking, much later, she would consent to become his wife. She declined

the request as if it had been insane; could any one suppose that she would ever marry again?

The second was a man about fifty years of age, well known about town, a member of the Jockey Club, enjoying, as the novels say, an immense fortune and unquestionably holding a very prominent position in society. He was the organizer of most of the war charities in which Odette's help had been sought. He loaned for them his buildings and what remained to him of his staff of servants, gave to them his time and his purse. Odette had touched him with one of those lightning strokes which reach only men of that age, and after her refusal he fell violently ill, remained depressed, downcast, aged, incapable of managing his business, obliged to retire to one of his country-places, where he became oblivious of everything, even of the war and its evils, of which up to this time he had thought only to seek a remedy, thinking now only of the cruel Odette.

She was as indifferent to this adventure

as to the other, notwithstanding the friendly remonstrances that poured in upon her. The latter offer had been made to her through Mme. de Blauve, and this friend, while bowing to the sentiment of fidelity which bound Odette to a beloved memory, took courage to point out to her that in the midst of her married happiness she had failed to found a family. Odette, with all her intelligence, her sincere devotion, did not understand. She had loved one man; she continued to love his memory. No other idea, with whatever importance it might be clothed, commanded her respect; she understood only her own heart, which simply clung like an ivy to the tree, however dried up it might be, and to which no power could prevent her clinging.

All Odette's friends shared Mme. de Blauve's opinion, however unlike they might be to this noble woman—all of them, even to Clotilde.

Yes, even Clotilde blamed her for not having at least accepted the young commandant. Odette was amazed at this, the

result being that these two loving women fell out.

La Villaumer, to whom Odette confided this trouble, said to her:

"If your friend Clotilde were to be so unfortunate as to lose her husband, whom she adores, the chances are sixty to a hundred that after a certain time she would love another as much or almost as much as him, while you judge such a transferrence of love inadmissible."

"But, after all, one loves or one does not love; that is perfectly simple!"

"No, indeed, it is not so simple as that. One loves and one can love as Clotilde does, or as you do, yourself. We do not easily distinguish differences so long as lovers, being united, are happy."

"You frighten me. Are there then loves that are not love? Is not sentiment the finest thing in love? And can there be a fine sentiment that is not lasting?"

"In the first place, my dear friend, permit me to believe that you do not profess your sentiment because it is fine, nor does it

last with you because you find it beautiful. You find your sentiment beautiful because it is yours. You look upon it as lasting indefinitely because your eyes are incapable of looking as far as its end; that is all. In your case there is no constraint, no submission to any law, æsthetic or moral. You feel that way. Your friend Clotilde loves in her way, and she finds it beautiful, believe me."

"All the same! All the same, there is an almost general consent to consider that love superior which is adorned with sentiment, and does not consent to be short-lived."

"Yes; and this is in conformity with the morality which has ruled us thus far. This morality is all delicacy. But, reduced to this degree of purity, will it suffice to keep alive a struggle as ardent as the one which we are now witnessing, for the possession of a part of the outside of the world, or even for the supremacy of certain ideas? It must concede provisionally a preponderance to material, mortal life, since it is evident that the morality of the just will triumph only on condition that it has force on its side.

Do you follow me, my poor friend? All this is very dry. But this is my way of telling you that these crystalline sentiments, that are an 'ornament' in ordinary times, become a luxury in our age of iron and fire. Luxury is no longer permissible. The time has come when all refinements must give way to a very stern reality. As you have been very well told: 'We are not our own.' General consent? It should be given to the best good of the cause which unites us all, and carries us all away with itself. Forgive me, my very dear friend. I am going to commit a rudeness which gives me pain—and you know that only the extremity of an unheard-of calamity could bring me to that—yes, your sentiment, with its persistence, is beautiful in itself, most beautiful; but we are no longer at leisure to look at things 'in themselves.' Well, if your friend Clotilde had lost her husband in your place and at the same time, and if she were to-day the wife of another who had made her a mother, for example, we ought really to hold her case in higher esteem than yours!"

A sob choked Odette. They were walking along the Champs-Elysées. She sought for a chair and sank upon it.

"I am not vexed with you," she said as soon as she could speak; "something in my inmost being understands you— It has already been said to me— But it is hard!"

"The time is exceptional."

XXIX

ODETTE spent much of her time in consoling poor Rose. Her husband's death had passed almost unnoticed. But other and very dramatic deaths had also passed unnoticed. When men were brought home in fragments it made a sensation, but once they were dead the sad equality of the earth obscured their memory. Indescribable episodes had attained such a character, and had reached such numbers, that people hardly dared speak of them. Minds were saturated and automatically closed against any new sensation. Many were unable to endure any story of the war, whether in the newspapers

or in books. Odette recalled to mind the impression which the wounded had formerly made. They were already saying "formerly" when speaking of the present war! Now there were wounded everywhere. It was rather the unscathed men upon whom one looked as if to say to them: "See here, you! what are you doing with your arms, with your legs?" Certain persons, with a strong revulsion of the instinct of self-preservation, refused, like Clotilde, even to think about the war; others, on the other hand, buried themselves in it with passionate intensity.

Mme. de Blauve, who had become fond of Odette and occasionally came to see her, now came to announce the marriage of her eldest daughter. She told the news almost as if saying: "At last!" as if it were the case of an old maid whom she had despaired of marrying off. Mlle. de Blauve was barely sixteen, she was attractive and endowed with much charm, had been most carefully educated, and promised to be really beautiful. She was to marry a wounded sub-lieutenant.

"Ah!" said Odette; "does she love him?"

"He is a young man of good family," said Mme. de Blauve, "and he has behaved admirably."

"But he will return to the front! You will be in perpetual anxiety!"

"Not that," replied Mme. de Blauve. "To be sure, my daughter would have liked to be the wife of a soldier who remained a soldier, like her father. But soldiers in active service will always find some one to marry them, and wives must be found for those less favored, who have been checked in their career——"

"Has her fiancé been retired?" asked Odette. "Don't tell me that he is badly——"

"Oh, this is not the time to think about things that girls used to care for; the question is to save our men by giving them wives, so that they may be in a position to found a family. This young man is from the devastated regions. He has lost all his family—some of them have been shot, others have died during the occupation of the enemy—and it is entirely impossible for him to earn

a decent living. We ourselves have sacrificed more blood than money; my daughter will still have a certain amount of fortune, therefore——"

"But what is the matter with him? What has he lost?" asked Odette, thinking only of that absolute union of two beings which had illuminated her own life.

"Oh, it is very sad," said Mme. de Blauve; "my future son-in-law is one of those most deserving of interest, who have received face wounds. His face—how can I tell you?—lacks almost everything except the passages that are necessary for eating and breathing——"

Odette uttered an inarticulate exclamation and rang the bell. But she did not faint until Mme. de Blauve was gone.

The case of Mlle. de Blauve evoked more criticism than admiration. According to some it was absolutely too terrible and not to be thought about. In most cases, however, sensitiveness had been so dulled by the constant hearing of war-stories that very

little attention was paid to this act of superhuman devotion. Some said: "The mother is crazy and the young girl does not realize what she is doing. One may do violence to nature, or may dupe it for a short time; this is a time when we ought to resolve upon any sacrifice, even to throwing ourselves into the arms of death; but death is either the end or the beginning of the unknown. The idea of marrying a superb girl of sixteen to a man without a face!"

Yet every one knew that far from bringing pressure to bear upon her daughter, Mme. de Blauve had made every possible effort to prevent her marrying another wounded man, an unlucky fellow who, approaching a trench with a grenade in each hand, had had both eyes burned at the very moment when a bursting shell had set off the two grenades and shattered both hands. What she was now doing was a slight thing in comparison with the thing that she had prevented.

Odette felt that she must know La Villaumer's opinion on this matter. They had no

regular engagement for meeting, and met only by chance. She decided to go to his house shortly before the luncheon hour. An old servant ushered her into a room where, to her great surprise, she heard the tones of a harmonium mingled with a man's voice entirely untrained. It proceeded from the neighboring room, separated from her by a glass door partly screened by a curtain of chinese silk. The thing was so unusual and so puzzling that she could not refrain from peeping around the edge of the curtain. She saw at the instrument an organist whom she knew, and standing beside him a man bereft of both arms, and the pose of whose head was that of a blind man trying to catch the notes which the teacher was patiently repeating. All around them were soldiers wearing black glasses, with closed eyes or with bandaged faces, and Villaumer in his dressing-gown coming and going among them. He suddenly disappeared and came into the room where Odette was standing.

"I have caught you!" said she. "Try now to convince me that what I have been told of

you is not true! You are no longer in your own home!"

"My good friend," he replied, "I am having lessons given to the most unfortunate of those unhappy ones whom evil fortune and inaction are driving to despair. They are being taught the rudiments of music; they are trying to sing; it occupies them."

"I knew that you were kind——"

"I am not kind; I am generally severe upon men. But the sight of misfortune is intolerable to me; and for men like these, who have been three-quarters destroyed for the sake of saving us, yes, I confess that I could give my last shirt; I would wait upon them at table— Will you take luncheon with us?"

Through the half-open door into the dining-room she could see a table spread for twelve.

"Do you take lunch with them?" asked Odette.

"I permit myself that honor— It is my last self-indulgence. Well, will you take advantage of it?"

"I cannot, my friend, I cannot. I should weep through the whole meal. That is not what they need."

"No. One must have the courage to bestow upon them the gayety—which we don't possess. Social hypocrisy has not been practised all this time in vain, if it has taught this to some of us."

"I am ashamed of my weakness," said Odette. "I should not flinch before any sort of wound, but the thought that the war has deprived a man of the light of day forces me to ask myself whether I myself have a right to look upon these beautiful silks, this sunlight——"

"Take pleasure in the silks, in objects of art, and in sunlight, you who are made to charm that portion of humanity that remains intact. You would not, on the pretext that millions of men have been plunged into darkness or death, irritate them gratuitously by an ill-regulated sympathy? Innumerable lives have, alas, been shattered, but life remains, the light is brilliant, plants are growing, animals and even men still swarm

upon the earth. Recall to mind the tragic and paradoxical truth that human life, which is the highest work and appears to have been the purpose of the creation of the world, is that for which, on the whole, that great work appears to care the least. Whatever part man may be called to play, his destiny is to pass away. That horror of war with which we are inspired by the extermination of men is in the long run kept up and perpetuated by material depredations; the memory of an illustrious building destroyed will last longer than that of a hundred thousand young men mown down in their youth."

"And meanwhile you are throwing overboard all you possess to rescue men who are only half alive. That is all that I wanted to know."

XXX

ODETTE spent several days in bed as a consequence of the marriage of the little de Blauve girl—which took place in the strictest privacy, and which she had not attended.

But her imagination was lively, and she pictured things to herself.

She sought out her friend La Villaumer, as it were, now that she had detected him in an act of kindness. As for him, in her presence he took less pains to conceal his acts, now that she understood him better.

"I have always loved men," he said. "Why should I not love them since I have always professed to criticise them? Have I misunderstood them? Remember how indulgent I was for all that in them is so far removed from the only thing that I really prize—intelligence. How vulnerable I have been to their instincts! How I have smiled at their innumerable follies! I simply enjoyed studying them, without the slightest partiality, notwithstanding my secret reverence for reason, which seems to me to be a torch lighted at the altar of a god and carefully transmitted by certain privileged beings to certain privileged beings, while yet the chain that they form never succeeds—no one can tell why—in producing an illumination. Therefore, I have never believed that the

world belonged to what we have learned to venerate under the name of intelligence. Intelligence is a divine part which no doubt gives us notions of what there is on high, but which has almost no application to things here below. The world is not governed by intelligence. Sometimes intelligence makes converts, and we believe that its reign has come. Illusion! It is precisely then that we are upon the point of falling again into blessed ignorance, and going back to the age of barbarism. Do you know, I am tempted to believe that the age of barbarism is the normal period of humanity! We probably need cruelty, absurdity, injustice, superstition, torrents of bloodshed, in order that the mystery which we admire under the name of life may exist and perpetuate itself. Our bodies can be fed only by offensive means. The majority of human pleasures are unfathomably stupid. The great masses obey certain elementary formulas, sayings of which they have never weighed the meaning, and which often have no meaning. Governments are not carried on by luminous reasoning, but

by the allurement of sounding words that flatter the senses. In order to hold our own in a large and influential social group, my poor friend, are we going to be called to admit the timeliness of belief in prophets, in wonder-workers, in ghosts, in the platitudes of 'apparitions,' in the genius of simple minds? Is a torrent of puerility about to inundate the surface of the globe? May it be that this is the indispensable element of reparation? Intelligence, reduced to its own resources, has in fact no power of expansion, no means of action. It is enough to make one die of shame and vexation! Law, justice, liberty—we can imagine men shrugging their shoulders when they hear the words, for the words are efficacious only when they are emptied of their significance and travestied into elementary ideas which naturally lead to the violation of law, liberty, justice. In the matter of ideas men believe only in their tutelary virtue; they are protecting divinities; and the idea is nothing but a word that men symbolize on their flagstaffs, like a fetich. We are as credulous as Homer's

warriors. Minerva fights with us. For that matter, I do not think that there ever was a better opportunity for adopting the theocratic conception of the world, for men are at this moment given over to the elements, and the greatest political genius imaginable would probably be powerless so long as the convulsions with which the world is attacked are not quieted of themselves. In these conditions there is no room in the home of a poor fellow for any but the virtues of pity and affection. I confess the fact, my dear Odette, I can no longer control my heart."

"To be moved to compassion is to be weakened, I have been told."

"There is truth in that opinion so far as those persons are concerned who are more especially called by circumstances to act, and especially to direct the actions of others; such must put on blinders and look only to the immediate purpose which demands all their energies. But it is desirable that in the midst of this tempest-tossed world a few contemplative persons shall devote themselves to pity as to the conservation of a

'precious blood'; if only for the sake of the efficacy, or at least of the beauty of the thing. And the worshippers at this altar will need to contend—do you know with whom? —with humanity itself, which has little remembrance of its own ills, and which, like a kitten, hastens to play with the first ray of sunshine. It is true that the dead keep a great silence."

XXXI

ODETTE was at home one evening, and alone. Stretched out upon a lounge, she was gazing at the photographs of Jean on little tables or within her reach upon the walls, hypnotizing herself with the sight of them, kissing them as she always did.

Amelia came in saying that the next apartment was "crammed full."

"Madame, if there aren't twenty men six feet high in that room, my own poor husband isn't a prisoner with the Boches!"

In fact there was a great commotion on the other side of the partition. Furniture

and chairs were being moved about, and as all sounds penetrated through the cracks of the door, the syllables of an unfamiliar language could be heard, perhaps Rumanian or Russian. The neighbor was a foreigner.

Suddenly there was silence. Amelia had withdrawn. It was an imposed, perhaps a concerted, silence. "It is a musical recital," said Odette to herself. In fact she almost immediately recognized the sprightly touch of the pianist, mellow, languishing, melting into the keyboard as into a tender flesh, by turns nervous, light, cruel as a hammer, heavy as a pile-driver, seeming to crush the instrument, then suddenly soft, fluttering on the keys like the wing of a dying bird. Though the woman often played for herself alone, this was not the first time that many people had gathered around her to hear her music.

A chorus of men's voices burst forth. It was strange, weird, enough to make one catch one's breath. Odette listened. That sensitiveness to music which often reached depths in her unknown to herself, was sud-

denly wrought up to its utmost pitch. She did not know the chorus, and sought in vain for an author to whom to ascribe it. It might be a popular song, perhaps very ancient, to judge by its artless simplicity, its pure rhythm, and its wild, sweet accent. At times a soprano voice uprose in a solo, and the chorus, a third below, responded softly in whisperings that grew nearer and nearer, quickly spreading like oil upon the sea, or as if transmitted from man to man over immense plains and endlessly flowing rivers. Suddenly two or three raucous or strident cries gathered up all the voices to a sharp point directed toward the heavens. Then all sound ceased, and one felt as if falling from a superb altitude into the depths of an abyss.

Then the fingers of the enchantress executed a ballad of Balakirieff, or Dvořák's hymn, "On the Death of a Hero." And then, after a pause, another chorus broke forth.

There was in it all a melancholy which no words could so much as suggest, in which amid the uniformly plaintive murmur one

discerned such lifelike wailings that one could have stretched out the hands to succor these vague, unrecognized, and multiplied sufferings. They swelled, spread abroad, took on so mighty an extension that in spite of oneself one saw the surface of the suffering world, heard the feeble and resigned voice of man, of man always the sport of fate, always in leading-strings, always sacrificed like cattle to gods whose secret he could not fathom. It was the lament of the ancient earth of humanity, timid, uncouth, and despairing, issuing from bruised hearts, from torn flesh, from souls robbed of their innocent ideals, a disturbing lament issuing from the borders of marshes, from forests, from glacial plains, from desert steppes, from nameless villages, prisons, palaces, battle-fields, tombs, and stoically, pathetically, and yet childishly addressed to—no one!

Odette had often been on the verge of sentiments corresponding to this music, primitive, barbarous, perhaps divine, but when music comes to be mingled with our

sentiments it reveals them to themselves and amplifies them without measure. Odette saw what she had never dared to see; for the first time she was transported outside of herself, or at least she felt the conviction that she was. It produced in her such an overturning of her points of view as almost to make her dizzy. She suddenly discovered how completely she had considered everything with reference to herself, even in her seemingly most generous moments. At this instant she thought of herself in relation to the incalculable number of persons who were not she. It was not that the moans of humanity were now reaching her for the first time, but it was the first time that the sobs of others came to her ears with a tone of majestic sadness which forced her to grovel upon the earth, saying: "I no longer count; I am only the servant of grief."

It was a painful sentiment if there is one, and yet, by a curious contradiction, a sentiment in the same degree joyful. A boundless commiseration caused her heart to throb and tears to come to her eyes, and yet this

painful sympathy, far from being cruel or depressing, wrought in her soul an unsuspected outflowering, like an outburst of inconceivable elation in which was mingled bitterness and pity.

There is no compensation for the personal suffering that we may experience. On the contrary, in a close and complete union with the sufferings of others is hidden a joy of mutual pain; an active desire to give aid impels to the beginning of a helpful act, provokes to so fervent a prayer for heavenly mercy that the heart no longer knows whether it lies prone in utter distress or has attained to a radiant phase of existence incomparably higher than its paltry estate as an isolated being. The word "love" presents itself to a soul thus irradiated without any sustaining form which might limit its character; it is without extent as without form; as to the source that feeds it, springing up no one knows where, one is convinced that there is no fear that it will ever be exhausted.

Odette often wept, but to-day it was with other tears. She took up one of Jean's pho-

tographs and found but one word to say to it:

"Forgive me!"

She understood neither what she felt nor what she was doing, but she was conscious of failing Jean. Not of failing Jean in favor of another, but for the sake of a multitude of others among whom no one man could be discerned. When she was able to formulate a thought, she said to herself: "I was pitying." She might have said: "Charity has taken possession of me."

XXXII

THERE was no sign that any event had occurred that evening. Odette had spent it alone in her little drawing-room. The chorus in the next apartment was stilled. But that evening was made up of the most important hours which the young wife had experienced since the death of her husband.

Odette was aware that something had been revealed within herself, but she was ill adapted to analyze herself, and the phe-

nomenon was still wrapped in mist. It had manifested its reality only by a single act of hers—an act which she remembered, which abode with her: the prayer for forgiveness addressed to the picture of her beloved Jean. She returned continually to this material fact; she had seized the photograph and had kissed it as if she had been at fault. Thanks to this fact, the spiritual operations of which it was the conclusion were not arrested, did not vanish like smoke, and pursued her that night, on the morrow, and during the following days.

So sudden a burst of light might indeed have been ephemeral in character. We are all subject, especially under an exterior influence acting upon the senses, to similar spasms of enthusiasm, or to dreams of a like generosity which may be only a passing impulse. They die away and we return to a condition which we call reasonable, that is to say, lucid, calm, well-balanced, and tame.

With Odette this illumination had not the character of a sudden impulse, but was rather the outcome of a long and almost un-

conscious preparation. How many words, how many tidings, how many hints registered in her memory, how many puzzling suggestions, how many dramatic scenes, how many ideas had been as so many arrows of direction, guiding her toward the place where she had received the divine spark! How many books read, how many musings, apparently without result, had determined the direction that had brought her here! Odette was like a clay which during two and a half years had been continually receiving the touches of a thumb or chisel, powerless to give her the form which an invisible artist desired her to take, and the last touch, removing an encumbering bit, had produced precisely the shape desired.

Odette awoke next morning in the same condition in which she had fallen asleep, with the one difference that she no longer wept. But the tears of the evening had had their sweetness. She found herself in an almost grateful tranquillity. She went and came in the midst of Jean's photographs, and Jean did not reproach her for her new

state of mind. His memory seemed to be in nowise outraged. And yet Odette did not forget that she had begged his forgiveness, as if it had been possible that she had failed him. This fact marked a well-determined date in the perturbations of her soul. But it seemed to her that she had received to her "Forgive me!" a gentle, calming reply, a loving approbation.

XXXIII

YET the moment came when it seemed to her that she was losing her reason. She had seen many cases of cerebral disturbance since the war; they had been more or less apparent. Some persons of her acquaintance had been duly shut up in insane asylums, but there were many at large who showed the almost imperceptible wound by which the microbe had penetrated.

By way of discovering whether or no she was mentally affected, she imposed upon herself the test of behaving for a while like a woman who has decided to lead the usual

life until the end. She said to herself: "I am not insane, for I think it requires more courage to adopt, every day and every hour, the attitude of ordinary life, as if the war did not exist—seeing that the majority of people who act thus have been crushed or tortured by it—than to give oneself up to the monster bound hand and foot. I am the less strong in not being able to endure the commingling of both interests and throwing myself into these horrors. I should be senseless if I deemed my own actions alone to be good, beautiful, and worthy. But I am judging myself. I am therefore not demented."

Out of curiosity she went one day to see Clotilde, still by way of test. "To measure myself," she said to herself.

Clotilde's undue self-satisfaction made her friends really uncomfortable, a discomfort which from the first they had sought to hide or refused to recognize, which until now such a friend as Odette had even refused to admit, but which to-day she could not endure. Clotilde, surrounded by flowers, bathed in a perfumed atmosphere, talked

only of a change she had made in the decoration of her rooms, of her clothes, or of matters so utterly foreign to current events that it seemed as if for her the latter had no existence. She never went out, lest she should be obliged to see or hear disagreeable things, and yet never had she bought so many hats and gowns as since the war. On her earlier visits Odette had slightly shrugged her shoulders as if amused and not wholly displeased. By degrees, the disproportion between such interests and the wound with which the whole world was bleeding overmastered her ability to make allowances.

Odette reminded her friend that she had not of late called upon her for help, and asked if she had lost her blind man. Clotilde was amazingly frank in her reply:

"My darling, 'my blind man,' as you call him, continues to exist and to charm my husband. But what would you have? It is not that I am lost to all sense of humanity, but you can imagine how the presence of this man annoys me. He cannot see me, I am

nothing to him, and it is necessary for me to please——"

"But one may please even those who don't see us. One can try to amuse these unfortunates, to make time pass pleasantly for them——"

"You speak as if you possessed some gift in which I am lacking. It is only that you like them, and know how to please them——"

"Oh!"

"You succeed in pleasing them! This man who visits us, with whom you took lunch, is always asking for you. He never so much as speaks of me. And yet it is I who permit him to come!"

"A man who cannot see you in your place at the head of the table, and to whom you never give any proof that you are there, may naturally forget you."

"You find it all right because he doesn't forget you. He dotes upon you, by what George says; he asks for news of you, he longs to hear your voice! He annoys me. In fact, child, it was precisely on your account,

I admit, that I was obliged to turn him away; he was falling in love with you. Can you imagine it? You ought to thank me!"

"In love with me! If that were true I should be all the more sorry for him, poor man! But he must have heard about me? He knows that I am not to be had?"

"He hasn't gone as far as that; he only feels happy in your company. When you are not there he misses you. That is all."

"Well, where is the love in that? He is like the wounded men whom I have nursed; they were happy in my company; when I went away, I suppose they missed me. If I had concluded from that that they were in love with me——"

"You didn't conclude it, on your part, but as for them, what do you know? Perhaps you broke their hearts!"

"You are romantic and think only of love! Men who have suffered as they have, prefer to think of their own comfort, and of those who make them comfortable. I knew a nurse seventy years old for whom her pa-

tients clamored like children. Were they in love with her?"

"That proves nothing. A blind man feels very clearly whether the woman near him is one who charms."

"Then he ought also to feel the compassion that he inspires, and that does not lead to love."

"Are you uncomfortable in the presence of a blind man?"

"It is an undefinable emotion; my head turns. I lose my self-command."

"You didn't seem to, here."

"One does almost involuntarily the thing that costs the most, if one is determined to comfort those whose misfortunes arouse your emotions."

And they talked of other things.

XXXIV

ODETTE would no doubt have forgotten "her" blind man if a visit which Mme. de Blauve paid her had not recalled him to mind in the most unexpected manner.

Mme. de Blauve, whose calmness had always impressed every one, from the time when she was living under the bombardment of Rheims through the days in which she had made the sacrifice of her husband, her two sons, and, one may say, her daughter, now appeared unnerved. She had grown thin; her eyes were sunken; she was evidently suffering.

With her habitual resolution she opened to Odette the purpose of her visit. She had heard — it was rumored — that her dear friend, having amply and worthily overpassed the period of her widowhood, was purposing—not by inclination, but in order to accomplish a great act of charity—to become the wife of a blinded officer. People were talking about it. She herself had been extremely moved by the news, and all the more because she feared that she had incurred a certain responsibility in the matter, having probably been one of the first to urge upon the young widow the duty of a second marriage.

Odette was amazed. What were people

about? Never had she had the slightest idea of such a thing. Startled at first, she went on, almost laughing, to hear what Mme. de Blauve had to say.

"It is untrue, you say," said Mme. de Blauve; "but, my little friend, experience has taught me that there is always a grain of truth at the bottom of a wide-spread rumor. Whether good or bad, such plants do not grow out of nothing."

Odette told her upon how slight a fact this rumor might possibly have been based. She had lunched at Clotilde Avvogade's with a blinded officer, and Clotilde insisted that she had pleased him.

"Nothing more would be needed!" said Mme. de Blauve, "and your friend has probably told the story all around. It must be so, for I have heard the name of the man, the institution where he has been re-educated; I even know all about his circumstances; he is a widower without fortune of any sort, and father of two little children about whom he feels great anxiety."

"Well," said Odette, "for my part I knew

nothing of these last particulars, and this is surely a proof that my romance has not gone very far."

Mme. de Blauve was lost in apologies. Nevertheless, she did not go so far as to regret the step she had taken. If it proved to have no reason in the present case, an analogous case might arise; she knew Odette's susceptibility, the noble impulses of her soul, and it was her duty to warn her against impressions and impulses——

"What!" interrupted Odette; "you, madame, whose daughter——"

"Yes, yes, precisely I, 'whose daughter'—It is because my daughter has made a marriage—beautiful, surely, from the moral point of view, but, after all, a marriage—how shall I say it—somewhat daring, that I believe myself to be authorized to say to you: 'My very dear child, be careful, reflect!' Understand me; I regret nothing that has occurred; I congratulate myself on the happiness which my daughter is assuring to a victim of the war, who is a hundred times deserving of it. Let me tell you, by way of

parenthesis, that my daughter has hope of a child, and I trust that God will bring everything out right, although——"

"Although," repeated Odette anxiously.

"Although—oh, the dear child is lacking neither in love nor in admiration for her husband, who is a hero; but our poor human nature has strange revulsions—I tell you, you alone, in confidence; since my daughter has reason for hope of becoming a mother, she feels—alas! it is frightful, let me whisper it to you—she feels a sort of apprehension at the sight of her husband, whose terrible affliction you know of!— We must, at all costs, prevent her husband having the slightest suspicion of the—temporary—feeling that he inspires, and the young wife is obliged to put the strongest restraint upon herself in order to show nothing. Just how far this incessant constraint is consistent with the happy maintenance of her condition, and with hope for its normal outcome, who shall say? This is what we are asking ourselves, this is our anxiety."

"Oh, dear, dear madame, how sorry I am for you!"

"You understand that I would not wish to have to be sorry for you, in my turn, for a reason like this. It was to avoid it that I came here, as much humiliated by my apprehensions as I was proud on the day of the marriage. You have no plan of the sort, you tell me, my child? So much the better! But I have become excessively apprehensive; I am afraid of characters like yours, which may be inclined to do too well. Sometimes a little pride enters into the good or the noble things that we do. Do you understand?"

XXXV

MME. DE BLAUVE had taken her leave with these words, and Odette, still breathless at the thought that there could be any question of her marrying, a little ruffled, even, remembered only the secret discomfiture confessed to by the mother of the poor little bride. It was one more cause of horror added to all those of which she was the daily witness. Her calamity had doubtless shaken Mme. de Blauve's spirit to the point of caus-

ing in her mind a sort of hallucination as to the fate which might be threatening the young widow. Or else Mme. de Blauve had made the most of slight rumors with no basis of truth, as a pretext for coming to confess her own anxiety. Or else—a conjecture which barely touched Odette's mind—Mme. de Blauve, as she had herself intimated, always erring through pride, felt a frightful satisfaction in the dangers with which she and her family were perpetually menaced, jealously guarding this bitter eminence, lest it might be seized upon by others! For one can come even to such a point.

What analogy could there be between the marriage of the little de Blauve girl, an ignorant child, with one of the most horribly mutilated of soldiers, and an imaginary marriage between her, Odette, who was going on to her thirtieth year, with a blinded man who was not disfigured? Young girls, women, were marrying blinded men every day; many more of them would do so, one must hope! The case might indeed be peculiarly delicate for her, a widow still in love

with her husband, and who was peculiarly sensitive to blindness; but if the case ever occurred it was she alone who had the right to judge of it. No one knew either the lasting nature of her grief or her personal repugnances; the matter in no slightest degree deserved attention.

In fact, at the point that Odette had reached, she could imagine no limit to devotion. In the marriages now in question, there was no mention of anything that had formerly been called happiness; the only thought was of kindliness toward most deserving beings who were suffering under the greatest of misfortunes, and the greater their misfortune, the greater, it appeared, ought to be the pleasure of alleviating it. She did not approve of Mme. de Blauve, if it was she who had urged her daughter to a marriage of charity, but she could perfectly understand the daughter's having made such a marriage. If a temporary check now and then occurred, it was due to a pathological condition which would eventually cease. She recalled to mind one of her friends, a

perfectly well-balanced girl, married to a very fine man whom she adored, who had taken a dislike to her husband during the whole period of her pregnancy, without in the least knowing why.

A few days later Odette received a letter from Mme. de Calouas, still in Surville, alluding to the prospect of her marriage to a blinded officer. So the utterly unfounded rumor had made its way to the depths of Normandy! And Mme. de Calouas, who was wisdom itself, and utterly removed from any suggestion that might have acted upon Mme. de Blauve, wrote to her as Mme. de Blauve had spoken: "Yes, dear friend, marry; I have never concealed from you that it is almost your duty. But beware of an excess of zeal! Take care not to undertake more than a woman of your temperament, brought up as you have been, attached to a beloved memory as you still are, will be able to endure. Remember that many of us can be heroic for a few seconds, a few hours, a few days, but that is very different from a whole lifetime."

Odette smiled, not only at the thought of what people were thinking of her, but at the solicitude which they expressed for her, and that sort of obsession for heroic acts which every one seemed to cherish. Odette had not the slightest intention of performing a heroic act. Nothing in her character had ever inclined her in that direction. Her heart was made for loving. She loved, she was sure that she loved. The one whom she loved was her husband—her Jean. She could ill analyze the character of the tenderness which at the same time she felt for every suffering creature on earth. And that was all. What would they have of her?

XXXVI

NEVERTHELESS she continued to be disturbed by the strange rumor which had been set afloat, which was still afloat, and she promised herself to speak about it to Clotilde, who without doubt had been the cause of its diffusion.

On drawing near to the house in which

Clotilde lived, she met Lieutenant Avvogade guiding his blinded man by the arm. She had not so much as thought of avoiding such an encounter.

When the blind man recognized Odette's voice his whole face was transfigured. He turned pale; he hardly had courage to speak. But she felt the effort with which his closed eyelids were directed toward the point in space from which her voice had come; her perfume had been wafted to him. This blinded man was looking at her, was seeing her in his imagination; perhaps he was seeing her much more beautiful, more alluring, than he had dreamed! He had been disturbed because opportunities to be with her had no longer been afforded him, and he did not know that it was not she herself who had prevented them. But an inward instinct, stronger than he had yet known, filled him with ecstasy in that moment of the young woman's presence. He inhaled her like a flower, he listened to her, was saturated with her. Believing himself to be behind the veil which hid the daylight from him, as behind a screen, he neglected to keep a watch on

himself, to impose constraint upon himself. His emotion was evident to those who saw him, and the agitation of a man so much to be pitied impressed her profoundly.

Odette told him that she had learned that he had two little children. Then the blinded man extended his hand to her; his throat contracted; he could not utter a word. Without hesitation Odette took the hand of this man, so good-hearted and so wretched, and let her own be enfolded in his. Not a word had been added to those alluding to the children, yet she felt that she had never heard from human lips such an expression of gratitude.

* * *

They were there, under the trees of the Square of the United States, one of the beauty spots of opulent, worldly Paris, where so many conventional words and actions must have been exchanged; and this agitated silence, those clasped hands, result of the universal woe, seemed to embody as in marble the symbol of a new beauty which effaced all that had before been known.

As the blind man made a motion to relinquish her hand, Odette said:

"*Au revoir*, messieurs"; and left them. The blind man remained motionless, either because he could not think it possible that she should go, or because he waited for his friend, who hesitated to urge him to leave the place.

* * *

Odette did not go up to Clotilde, even at the risk of permitting her lack of protestation to be accepted as acquiescence. She felt herself incapable of talking with any one whose heart was not overflowing. She did not disdain the sight of her flowers, her preoccupation with personal pleasures; she would despise nothing, these were tastes which inspired her rather with pity. Toward those who have greatly suffered it was not pity that she felt, but *attraction;* an irresistible attraction.

* * *

She was soon joined by one who greeted her. It was La Villaumer, returning from a

visit to a sick man in the Rue Bizet. He turned toward the two men who were going away and asked Odette:

"Then it is true? They told me——"

"Only one single thing is true," said Odette, "and that is that they told you."

"There is only one single thing true," replied La Villaumer, "and that is that you feel as imperative a need to do good, as most poor mortals of good being done to them. If I had not seen—I should say to you, as others will say to you: 'My friend, take care, keep yourself in hand!' But I have just seen the face of this man who is deprived of light, and who perhaps feels the lack of you more than of the beauty of the light, and I tremble— It seems to me that I see you, my poor dear friend, reaching the last stage of an evolution which I have watched as if it had been my own. Many will look upon this acme of your self-sacrifice as an immolation. But I recall to mind the words that I have so often spoken to myself: 'You no longer Count!' The individual is dead— Provisionally, but for a time

which we cannot estimate, the individual is dead— In fact, you yourself have perceived that you no longer have any rights, not even the right to mourn your unending grief. The moment has come to mourn more largely, more grandly, with the only grief that can save a soul like yours. The only hope of a resurrection lies in giving oneself to the common need, and losing oneself in it with love."

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